

JUNE 2007

# IN THESE TIMES

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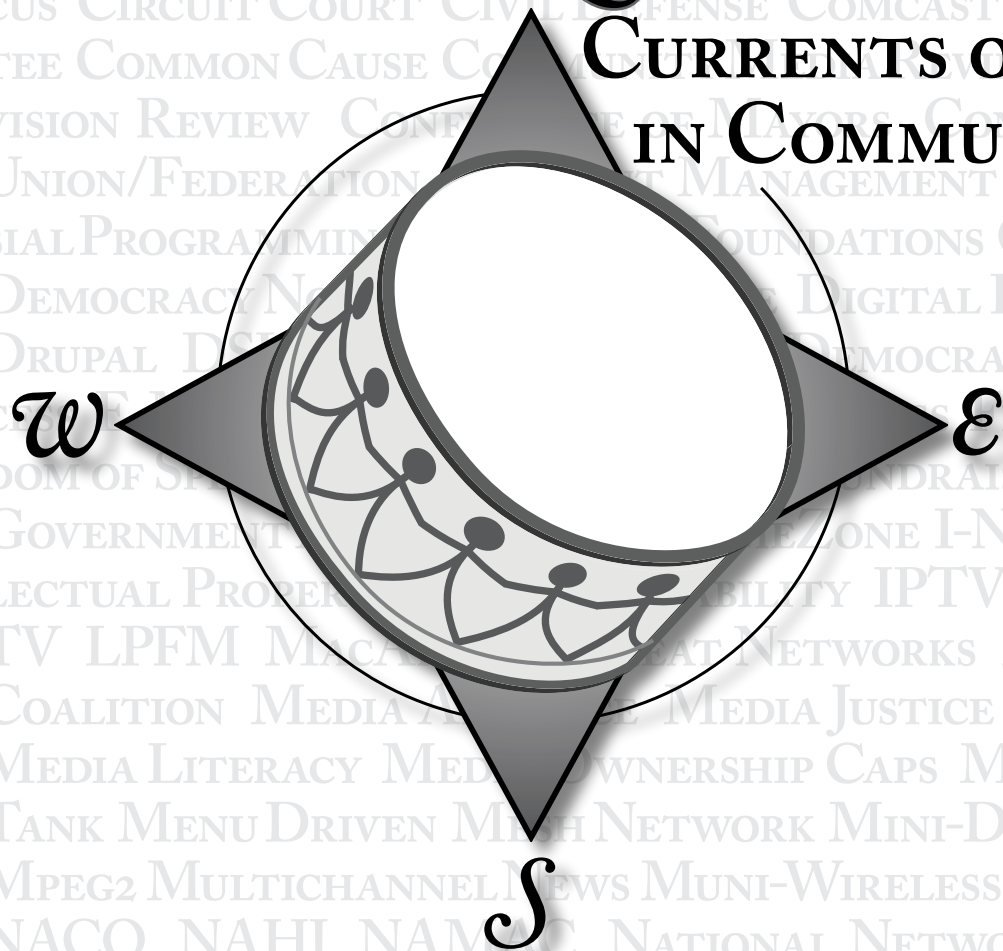
**Farm bill 2007:**  
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Meet the netroots activists who have moved offline  
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## Postal Rates = Free Press

**I**N 1792, THE United States Congress converted the free press clause in the First Amendment from an abstract principle into a living reality for Americans by providing newspapers with low postal rates. These low rates were crucial for the growth and spread of the abolitionist movement, the populist movement and progressive politics. More broadly, they have been central to development of participatory democracy in general.

Today, magazines like *In These Times* face an immediate threat to their financial health, and perhaps survival, due to a massive postal rate increase that will go into effect on July 15.

To the surprise of many independent publishers, in February the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC), the body in charge of determining postal rates, rejected a rate-hike plan that was submitted by the U.S. Postal Service, the people in the business of delivering the mail for the past 215 years. This plan was widely understood to call for an approximate 12 percent increase that would have hit all publications more or less equally.

Instead the PRC adopted a revised version of an extremely complicated proposal submitted by media conglomerate Time Warner that included a number of possible discounts favoring the largest publishers. Time Warner is the largest magazine publisher in the nation. To make up for the discounts and maintain their revenue targets, some magazines will have to pay a lot more than the 12 percent increase most had budgeted for. Research by McGraw-Hill, a magazine and book publisher, suggests many publications, particularly small and medium-circulation publications, could now be looking at immediate postal rate hikes well above 20 or 25 percent—thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars in additional costs that will strain already tight budgets.

The PRC's Time Warner plan was approved by the Postal Board of Governors in March. Only then did many small publishers, media and public interest activists, and even members of Congress

learn of this radical rate change.

Because the Postal Service is a monopoly, and because magazines must use it as their main distribution network, the postal rates have always been skewed to make it cheaper for smaller publications to launch and to survive.

The genius of the postal rate structure over the past 215 years was that it did not favor a particular viewpoint; it simply made it easier for smaller magazines. That is why the publications opposing the new postal rate hikes cross the political spectrum, and include the *National Review*, *American Spectator*, *The Nation*, *Mother Jones* and *In These Times*. This is a democracy issue. It is about fostering competitive media markets that benefit all Americans.

Ironically, America's first, and arguably most brilliant, media policy is also crucial for keeping the Internet open and vibrant. Much of the public affairs material that people read on the web is generated by these print publications. If the print publications do not exist, these stories do not get written or posted online.

That is the bad news.

The good news is that a number of small publications and Free Press, a non-partisan media reform organization, have organized a campaign to draw public attention to this crisis. Their website, [www.stoppostalratehikes.com](http://www.stoppostalratehikes.com), provides links to all the relevant data and news articles and has generated 60,000 letters of protest. Rep. Danny Davis (D-Ill.), chair of the House subcommittee that oversees postal rates, has agreed to hold a congressional hearing before the potentially disastrous Time Warner plan goes into effect.

It is imperative that the truth emerges about this plan. The exact amount of its rate hikes for periodicals—still unclear, even to the Postal Service—and the implications for a free press must be understood before we take a reckless dive off a cliff on July 15. Please go to [www.stoppostalratehikes.com](http://www.stoppostalratehikes.com), read the background material and consider signing the letter.

—Robert McChesney

# IN THESE TIMES

"With liberty and justice for all..."

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ACTING MANAGING EDITOR Phoebe Connelly

ASSOCIATE EDITOR Brian Cook

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EDITOR-AT-LARGE Jessica Clark

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CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Dean Baker, Frida Berrigan, Will Boissvert, Phyllis Eckhaus, Barbara Ehrenreich, Annette Fuentes, Mischa Gaus, Juan Gonzalez, Miles Harvey, Paul Hokenos, George Hodak, Doug Ireland, John Ireland, Hans Johnson, Kari Lydersen, Naomi Klein, John Nichols, James North, James Parker, Kim Phillips-Fein, Jehangir Pocha, Aaron Sarver, Fred Weir, Adam Werbach, Slavoj Žižek

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# mixed reaction

## JUST THE FACTS



**\$10,000–\$12,499**

Average annual salary of Florida farm worker

**\$18,486** Minimum annual income required for one adult in Immokalee, Fla., as figured by the University of Pennsylvania

**2.5** Tons of tomatoes that a worker has to pick each 10-hour workday to earn Florida's minimum wage of \$6.67 per hour

**\$14** Average hourly salary that a study commissioned by McDonald's claims that tomato pickers in Florida make. The study was discredited by leading legal, labor and social research scholars, including former U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich.

“

In sum, the notion that the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act furthers any legitimate governmental interest is, quite simply, irrational. ... [T]he Court's defense of it cannot be understood as anything other than an effort to chip away at a right declared again and again by this Court—and with increasing comprehension of its centrality to women's lives.

”

—RUTH BADER GINSBURG, DISSENTING OPINION, *GONZALES V. CARHART* (2007)

**LABANARAMA** BY TERRY LABAN



## QUID PRO QUO

### THE QUID:

One man wanted a job doing legal work. One man needed \$17,000 to pay off his embarrassing credit card debt. One man dreamed bigger, hoping to be the warden of a private prison in sunny Barbados (although he'd settle for a lobbying gig and some inflated payments to the flooring company he owned). Luckily for these Alaskan state lawmakers, there existed a powerful entity munificent enough to grant these wishes: the oil giant Veco Corp.

### THE QUO:

In return, according to a May 4 federal indictment of the two former state reps and one current state rep, Veco asked that they use their positions to make sure the company's preferred versions of an oil tax and pipeline bills passed. At times, that required pressuring another legislator to change his vote by placing a "hold" on a bill important to him. On a different occasion, that meant, as one of the indicted once



explained to Veco's chief executive, he "had to cheat, steal, beg, borrow and lie." This kvetching, though, failed to move the exec, who simply responded: "I own your ass."

# letters



## The World Gets Worse

The world is not as good a place today as it was yesterday. It is not as kind or as civil.

I met Kurt Vonnegut after hearing him speak 29 years ago in Columbia, S.C. He made the audience laugh, cry and feel comfort and discomfort. I was one of many who surrounded him after the event. He turned and looked at me and asked, "What can I do for you?" I said, "You've already done it. You've shaped my perspective on life and made me realize there were others who felt the things I felt." He smiled, shook my hand and said, "That's my job." Perfect!

I was 21 then. Now I am 50, but never lost the valuable gifts Kurt Vonnegut gave me. The planet mourns our loss.

*Charles Nicholson  
via e-mail*

It was summertime in Cleveland about 1974 when I saw Kurt Vonnegut defend his books that the Stronville City Schools were banning.

Hearing an author defend his words against uptight school board members was a great gift. The readers of the

world have lost a great, great writer.

*Carrie Dietrich  
via e-mail*

## Neutrality's Not Enough

I'm writing as a 28-year subscriber to *In These Times*, past freelance contributor and longtime activist within the Communications Workers of America (CWA). In that last capacity, I've been involved in promoting CWA's "Speed Matters" agenda, a comprehensive

## How can a magazine that has fought so hard against systemic oppression mindlessly endorse the oppression of sexual diversity?

set of progressive telecom policy proposals that Brian Cook references in "Not Neutrality" (April). Since aspects of CWA's agenda are greatly under-valued in the article, I would suggest readers check it out at [www.speedmatters.org](http://www.speedmatters.org). As one union spokeswoman quoted by Cook points out, "We probably agree with 95 percent [of the platform] of those supporting net neutrality."

Several of Cook's sources turned a difference in emphasis involving the other 5 percent into a portrait of a union that selfishly favors its "members' interests above those of society" because "CWA wants to be able to preserve jobs at AT&T and Verizon." But I believe preserving jobs with decent wages, defined benefit pensions, fully-paid medical coverage and collective bargaining rights is itself a socially-use-

ful goal—if only because it resists the alternative model of non-union labor relations championed by some of the biggest financial backers of net neutrality: Amazon, e-Bay, Google, Microsoft, Yahoo, et al. Though barely mentioned by Cook, their current market capitalization of nearly half a trillion dollars has helped buy massive political influence among both parties.

Cook lauds one of these business-backed pols—Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine)—

for introducing legislation with a narrow focus on net neutrality. Meanwhile, Snowe has done little to oppose Verizon's attempt to abandon landline customers in New England by selling off all its rural access lines. Members of CWA and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers are uniting with consumer allies to block this \$2.7 billion deal.

At the moment, many telecom users are far less concerned about "net neutrality" than being permanently relegated to "dirt-road dial-up" technology that's incapable of supporting economic development and new job creation in the region. For more on that threat, go to [www.stop-the-sale.org](http://www.stop-the-sale.org) and decide for yourself which side CWA is on.

*Steve Early  
Arlington, Mass.*

## Thank You Sir, May We Have Another?

*In These Times* needs to list Dave Mulcahey on the Appall-O-Meter for "Who's Been a Naughty Diplomat?," which mocked an Israeli ambassador for participating in BDSM erotic play ("Appall-O-Meter," May). You simply can't mock one person without indicting the millions of decent, loving couples that engage in some version of this relatively common form of sex. How can a magazine that has fought so hard against systemic oppression mindlessly endorse the oppression of sexual diversity?

The rights of consensual adult partners (or soloists) to pursue their own sexual expression should not be trampled in an attempt to buttress political analyses of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This example of embracing oppression to fight oppression demonstrates a lack of creativity that tests the upper limits of the Appall-O-Meter.

*Joshua Richards  
via e-mail*

## DAVE MULCAHEY RESPONDS

On behalf of the Plain Vanilla Puritan (PVP) community, I must take exception to Richards' letter. When will people like him realize that millions of loving PVP Americans find pleasure and validation in sharing (or enjoying solo) their shame-derived fascination with deviancy? We would like to think that in 2007 we could do so free from the oppressive, totalizing discourse of libertinism. Perhaps as a culture we have not come so far as we like to believe.

# contributors

## Dear Reader,

With this issue we bid farewell to Tracy Van Slyke. Tracy joined *In These Times* in August 2003 as associate publisher and in June 2005 was named publisher.

Over the past two years, Tracy has worked hard to develop the infrastructure that a sustainable media institution requires. Today, *In These Times* is in immeasurably better shape than when she came on board. She has been instrumental in developing a staff, that, following her lead, is young, energetic and passionate about the publication.

Tracy will continue to shape the world of the independent media. She is working with The Media Consortium to coordinate this new network of leading progressive independent journalism organizations. And, with *In These Times* Editor-at-Large Jessica Clark, Tracy is co-authoring a book about the impact of independent media on the progressive movement and national politics. This book is the continuation of their exploration of the progressive media landscape in articles such as "Welcome to the Media Revolution" (May 2006) that featured the now-famous map—"The Emerging Progressive Media Network."

On behalf of the staff, our writers and members of the *In These Times* community, we wish Tracy the best. She will be missed.



Joel Bleifuss  
Editor

## YOUR IDEALS CAN LIVE ON.

### REMEMBER IN THESE TIMES IN YOUR WILL.

For more information call Anna Grace Schneider at 773-772-0100 x 242 or e-mail her at: [anna@inthesetimes.com](mailto:anna@inthesetimes.com).



**LAURA FLANDERS** hosts RadioNation, heard nationally on the Air America Radio network and on public radio. She is the author of *Bushwomen: Tales of a Cynical Species*; *Real Majority*, *Media Minority: The Cost of Sidelining Women in Reporting*; and editor of *The W Effect: Sexual Politics in the Bush Years and Beyond*. A Nation Institute Fellow, Flanders lives in New York City.



**CONOR KENNY** is the managing editor of [Congresspedia.org](http://Congresspedia.org), a collaboratively edited citizens' encyclopedia on Congress. He suggests that progressives who want to get involved in the grassroots reform movement detailed in "Hello, I'm a Democrat" should visit [LeftyBlogs.com](http://LeftyBlogs.com) to find blogs in their state and [DfALink.com](http://DfALink.com) to find groups in their neighborhood. Conor studied political economy at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Wash., and Deep Springs College in California. He is based in Washington, D.C.

**FATIMA SHAIK** is the author of four books set in Louisiana and a former reporter for the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*. She teaches at Saint Peter's College and is completing a non-fiction book about the Societe d'Economie, a black benevolent association that worked in her neighborhood for more than 100 years.

**ADAM DOSTER**, a frequent contributor to *In These Times*, last wrote about the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act in the February issue. He graduated from the University of Michigan a couple weeks ago, which might explain why his next piece is tentatively titled, "What's a Lefty College Graduate Supposed To Do?"



The work of these writers is supported by the Puffin Foundation First Amendment Fund.

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### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Klee Benally calls Snowbowl's sewage treatment proposal "a severe act of cultural degradation."

## Sacred Lands, Sewer Snow

### American Indians fight to stop an Arizona ski resort from making snow out of sewage water

BY CHELSEA ROSS

**J**UST SOUTH OF THE Grand Canyon and seven miles north of Flagstaff, the volcanic San Francisco Peaks loom 12,000 feet above the Arizona landscape. They also sit at the intersection of a cultural, environmental and commercial controversy—one that could make its way to the Supreme Court.

The Peaks, which are managed by the United States Forest Service (USFS) as part of the Coconino National Forest, are held sacred by 13 American Indian tribes. So when Arizona Snowbowl, a ski resort that leases almost 800 acres of the mountain, proposed in 2002 to expand its facilities and make fake snow out of water reclaimed from sewage treatment plants, environmentalists and tribal leaders came together in opposition.

Snowbowl manager J.R. Murray says the resort had been looking for a water source to make snow for decades. "The precipitation in the Peaks cycles. Right now, we're in a dry cycle," Murray says.

"In a great year, we're open 120 days. This year, we were only open 40 days. We weren't open for Christmas. That's like a mall not being open for Christmas."

Included in the proposal were plans for a 14.8-mile buried pipeline that would transport the class A-plus wastewater (a step below potable) from the Flagstaff Water Reclamation Plant to a 10 million-gallon man-made storage pond on the mountain. In a state with a perpetual water supply shortage, using wastewater provided Snowbowl with a viable way to keep its business running.

But for environmentalists and tribal members, the plan was unacceptable.

"Snowbowl's proposal would not only disrupt and negatively impact the sensitive mountain ecosystem and public health, but it is also a severe act of cultural degradation," says Klee Benally, an organizer with the Save the Peaks Coalition and a Navajo Tribe member.

The coalition of tribes and environ-

mentalists brought the issue to Federal District Court, which in January 2006 ruled in favor of the USFS' approval of the plans on all counts. But on March 12, the 9th Circuit Court overturned two counts of that ruling, making it illegal for Snowbowl to go ahead with its plans to make snow from reclaimed wastewater.

In his 64-page decision, Judge William Fletcher wrote that the human health impacts of using wastewater had not been sufficiently evaluated, and that making snow from wastewater violated the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), based on the religious practices of the Navajo, Hopi and Havasupai tribes.

The ruling marks an unprecedented application of RFRA, says attorney Howard Shanker, who represented the 13 tribes along with the Sierra Club, the Flagstaff Activist Network and the Center for Biological Diversity in the class action suit.

Shanker says that while sewage-treatment plant wastewater is a "very valuable resource in Arizona, it's not tested for things like hormones and antibiotics." There have not been many conclusive studies of the effects of wastewater, but a 2005 study published by the University of Exeter in England found that long-term exposure to wastewater effluent resulted in reproductive mutations in fish, among other biological effects.

But Murray says the use of wastewater should not be an issue. "It's used everywhere in Arizona and in Flagstaff," he says, "in city parks, in ponds where you can eat the fish, golf courses, lawns, the university campus and on Indian reservations. Everybody in the state of Arizona understands reclaimed water, [but] the judges don't."

Judge Fletcher, however, compared the spraying of such snow on the Peaks to the government requiring that "baptisms be carried out with 'reclaimed water.'"

He also wrote, "We are struck by the obvious fact that the Peaks are located in a desert. It is (and always has been) predictable that some winters will be dry."

Murray contends it is impossible for most ski resorts to run without making fake snow and insists Snowbowl will close unless it does so. But even with the risk of closure, which Fletcher said was not necessarily imminent, the 9th Circuit's decision



stated, "We are not convinced that there is a compelling governmental interest" to justify the use of reclaimed wastewater in relation to the "substantial burden" on the exercise of tribal religious practices.

Murray and Snowbowl owner Eric Borowsky argue that the issue is one of public land usage, not religious freedom. A press release put out after the ruling stated, "If this ruling is allowed to stand, then our national policy and congressionally mandated multiple use doctrine on public lands is dead for all practical purposes. The ramification of this ruling, if left unchallenged, will be devastating to the taxpayer's access and use of its lands."

"What's wrong with sharing the peaks?" asks Murray. "We have one percent, they have 99 percent, we're happy. The opposition groups are basically saying that [they] want the ski area off the mountain and don't care who enjoys skiing, religious beliefs are more important than multiple uses of the land and recreational use."

According to Benally, the conflict is a "throwback to the days of racism and disrespect" toward American Indians and created deep divisions within the

Flagstaff community.

To support Snowbowl, the Flagstaff Chamber of Commerce and the Flagstaff Ski Club formed Reclaim the Peaks!. The group is raising money to assist with the costs of further litigation if an appeal is granted. Snowbowl has already spent an estimated \$4 million on legal fees.

The idea of losing the case "is painful, considering the legacy indigenous people have faced," says Benally. "You have to acknowledge the context of genocide, the cultural degradation, the racism."

Whether an appeal will be made to the Supreme Court is up to the Department of Justice, which recently filed a request with the 9th Circuit Court for an extension on making that decision, according to Coconino National Forest Public Affairs Officer Raquel Romero.

Murray is certain the case will make it to the Supreme Court. "If we prevail," he says, "well, the Indians might have to adjust some of their thought processes or religious practices. But if they win, the ski area goes away." ■

**CHELSEA ROSS** is a Chicago-based freelance writer, photographer and graphic designer.

## Chicago Unions Flex Political Muscle

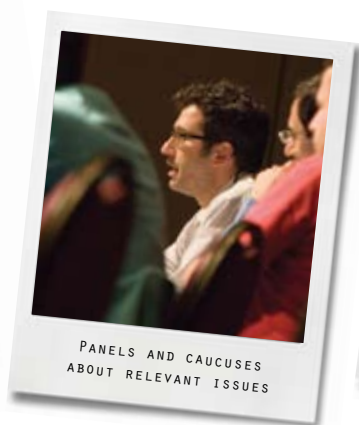
**F**RUSTRATED WITH CITY hall's tilt to a business elite, Chicago's labor unions decided to send Mayor Richard M. Daley a message: The "city that works" doesn't work for working families. In the February and April elections, the labor movement broke with the city's fabled but feeble Democratic machine, and helped oust key Daley allies and elect seven new members to the 50-seat city council.

Despite scandals engulfing his top aides, the mayor easily won his sixth term in February against weak opponents. But the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL)—for decades a pillar of the city's machine politics—did not endorse Daley (although the building trades did). Instead, unions spent roughly \$3 million and fielded a political operation stronger than Daley's that backed challengers to the mayor's council allies.

They targeted aldermen who had opposed labor objectives, such as a living wage for "big box" retail workers. Al-

# YEARLY★KOS convention

BUILDING A NETROOTS NATION



AUGUST 2-5, 2007 ★ CHICAGO

Be an active part of history and register today at [yearlykosconvention.org](http://yearlykosconvention.org)

## LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

Many philanthropic projects struggle with getting the media attention that usually translates into funding. To address this, GlobalGiving.org, an online group that connects donors to causes it endorses, has launched the GlobalGiving FilmFest. Using footage submitted by organizations, aspiring filmmakers produce animations, viral videos and “mashups” (videos combining multiple sources) that spotlight the work of GlobalGiving’s member organizations.

The benefits are twofold—organizations receive free publicity for their issues, and aspiring filmmakers gain exposure and the chance to win up to \$1,000 in scholarships. Meredith Landis, of GlobalGiving, calls the film fest a “logical choice” for harnessing the power of viral video.

Landis says the response from partner organizations has been good. “We sent cameras to nine projects that would otherwise not have been able to participate ... and currently have footage from 17 projects,” she says. Though three winners will be announced, all films will be made available to the projects that they depict, creating a valuable fundraising tool for organizations in rural areas and other places that are difficult to reach. To date, videos have been submitted on projects that teach life skills to Indonesian tsunami survivors, reduce poverty of Indian rat catchers and provide pigs for Haitian families.

The winning videos will be announced on July 9. For more information, or to view the videos, visit [www.globalgiving.com/ggfilmfest](http://www.globalgiving.com/ggfilmfest).

—Erin Polgreen



though the council passed the ordinance last year, several aldermen later switched votes, dooming the effort to override Daley’s veto. In 2004 the council had also split over Wal-Mart’s request, supported by Daley, to build two stores in Chicago, one of which was narrowly approved.

In the council debates about Wal-Mart and the living wage standard, black council members split into a pro-labor faction and a faction that attacked unions as racist enemies of the black community. Black council members targeted by labor in this year’s elections continued their race-baiting attacks, even though the most politically active unions, such as the Service Employees (SEIU) and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), have a majority black membership in Chicago.

Most unions regarded the battle over the big box ordinance as a symptom of the new class-based divide in Chicago politics, but not the crux of their dispute with Daley. “It became symbolic of the city’s relationship to the labor movement,” says John Cameron, political director for AFSCME District Council 31, “to the extent that it refocused city politics around class, wages and jobs instead of race and ethnicity issues, which have always been the historic conversation, or ‘independent’ versus ‘machine’ politics, when independent didn’t necessarily mean pro-labor. For the first time I can remember, we had a city election about class.”

“The press wants to make it about big box,” says SEIU State Political Director Jerry Morrison, “but this is about a larger agenda, about SEIU and the rest of the labor movement building independent political power.” Unions began planning their challenge to Daley’s allies long before the big box vote, and they have goals far beyond challenging Wal-Mart.

Chicago’s economy has been relatively strong under Daley, who has promoted the city as a global hub for business services, rather than the city of big shoulders as it once was known. New apartment towers flourish around the downtown, and gentrification has spread into working-class neighborhoods. Daley lavished subsidies on business through tax increment financing districts that were intended to revive blighted neighborhoods but which have mainly benefited already dynamic Loop locations, depriving local government of desperately needed taxes in the process.

The mayor—typically with city council



Jose Gomez walks alone on the picket outside the Congress Plaza Hotel.

support—refused to aid key organizing drives at the city’s major hospital chains, failed to support hotel workers now on strike for nearly four years at the Congress Hotel, dragged out city worker contract negotiations, and pushed privatization of city services and properties.

“It will be good to have a more independent council,” says SEIU Illinois Council President Tom Balanoff. “We sensitized the aldermen to working family issues. Equally important, labor has established its independence from many of the city’s political fiefdoms. Now the challenge is to figure out how to use the new-found power, or perception of it, for working families.”

A potential new labor/reform council bloc would not have a majority but would roughly double its previous size. Labor and its community allies have no settled agenda but are likely to push for strong affordable housing legislation, reforms of tax increment financing and a new living wage bill. Reformers may also pursue ethics reform and the creation of a civilian police review board.

Overall, University of Illinois at Chicago political science professor Dick Simpson says, the new council bloc will be pushing a “working-class, middle-class agenda, as opposed to the global economy tilt of the Daley administration.”

Having broken loose from its self-imposed shackles to the Daley machine, Chicago labor unions say they will escalate their fight in the council and in elections to come. After a long detour through machine politics, Chicago may be returning to a version of the labor politics that made it famous more than a century ago.

—David Moberg

## Fighting Corporate Copper in Bougainville

**B**OUGAINVILLE, A SMALL Pacific island belonging to Papua New Guinea in the volcanic “Ring of Fire,” has had a rough go of it. It endured a series of colonialist regimes (including Germany, Japan and Australia), was blitzed by U.S. forces during World War II, and has been assaulted by tsunamis, most recently on April 1. It also suffered one of history’s most brutal rapes of natural resources—the massive Panguna copper mine run by a subsidiary of the multinational mining giant Rio Tinto from 1972 until 1988.

Now, it appears Bougainville residents may finally get a measure of justice against the forces that caused extensive deforestation, pollution and military repression that allegedly led to the deaths of more than 10,000 islanders.

A lawsuit filed under the Alien Tort Claims Act of 1789, which allows foreign nationals to sue corporations in U.S. courts, demands Rio Tinto remedy environmental devastation from the mine and pay restitution to tens of thousands of residents who were displaced, sickened or lost family members from either the mine’s operations or the decade of war that raged after an uprising forced its closure.

The lawsuit was filed in 2000 in San Francisco, since Rio Tinto has a subsidiary called Rio Tinto Borax located in the Mojave Desert in California. In 2002, the suit was dismissed at the behest of the State Department, which argued it would interfere with the country’s peace process that in 2005 resulted in the election of Bougainville’s first autonomous government.

In April, the U.S. Court of Appeals, against the wishes of the Bush administration, affirmed its 2006 decision that the lawsuit could proceed.

“If the case does go forward, the company intends to establish that the plaintiffs’ allegations against Rio Tinto are false and that Rio Tinto is not liable for the injuries that the plaintiffs claim,” says company spokesperson Christina Mills, who declined to comment further.

Berman says Rio Tinto will likely try to take the case to the U.S. Supreme Court. “This certainly is a lead case now in the issue of deference to the State Department,” says Berman. “Usually if the government says we don’t want this case to go forward, it won’t go forward. But this court said it won’t defer to the Executive Branch.” Since 1993, approximately 36 human rights abuse suits have been filed against corporations under the Act. More than half have been dismissed, but others have resulted in large financial settlements.

Bougainville is located at the far western tip of the Solomon Islands archipelago about 500 miles from mainland Papua New Guinea, and its residents are ethnically and culturally distinct from those of the mainland.

The copper lode has been central to Bougainville’s struggle for independence from Papua New Guinea, which itself won independence from Australia in 1975 but refused to grant Bougainville independence for fear of losing the mineral resources.

In November 1988, militants forced the mine to close through blowing up power pylons and other acts of sabotage. For a decade following the mine’s closure, a war raged between the Bougainville Revolutionary Army and Papua New Guinean and Australian military forces trying to quell the independence movement and reopen the mine. By the time a ceasefire was signed in 1998, more than 10,000 Bougainville residents—about one-tenth of the island’s population—had been killed.

The lawsuit alleges that, in addition to the 10,000 dead, the mine also caused the destruction of a way of life—the matrilineal tribal and subsistence fishing and farming culture that earned it the name “Sacred Island.” “A deep sense of social malaise set in, which expressed itself in clan tensions, depression, alcohol abuse, rage, traffic accidents and incidents of violence—all distress signals of a people severed from their roots,” the suit claims.

The suit quotes tribal leader Perpetua Serero, who says, “We don’t grow healthy crops anymore, our traditional customs and values have been disrupted and we have become mere spectators as our earth is being dug up, taken away and sold for millions.”

—Kari Lydersen

## The Checkpoint Women of Israel

**D**APHNE BANAI, 57, carries many dark tales, like the one she tells of pleading futilely with an Israeli soldier on behalf of a 78-year-old Palestinian man not allowed through to his village, though his papers were in order, because of closure.

“What you see,” says Banai, a leader of Machsom (Checkpoint) Watch, who monitors the treatment of Palestinians at the more than 600 West Bank check-



**Raheli Bar-Or of Machsom Watch keeps an eye on an Israeli soldier as Palestinians pass through the army’s Jubara checkpoint near the West Bank town of Tulkarem.**

points, “you cannot unsee.”

What many of the soldiers see when Machsom women appear at the checkpoints are Israelis of dubious loyalty.

“Most of the soldiers are very angry at us,” says Banai. “They don’t like having ‘those bitches,’ as they call us, looking over their shoulders. It’s much easier to do what you want [if we weren’t there], like being able to slip up and give an old Palestinian a slap.”

Machsom, founded in 2001 by three female human rights activists, does not allow men as checkpoint-watchers. They can be translators, or drivers, or checkpoint-visitors, but checkpoint-watching is the work of women.

“There are a couple of reasons for that,” says Banai. “First, almost all Jewish men do compulsory army service, then active reserve duty. As they are always between one period of being soldiers and another, this would complicate things for them,



both with the soldiers at the checkpoints and the Palestinians. We, on the other hand, represent the civil society to which the soldiers and the Border Police are accountable. We represent their mothers, their grandmothers [many of the Machsom women are grandmothers], their girlfriends, their wives."

Eighty-five percent of Israel's checkpoints, designed to choke off terrorism at its point of origin, are inside the West Bank. Palestinians traveling from towns and villages, whether to find work or give birth or honor the dead, experience aimed guns, hard questions and long waits.

Banai travels to the West Bank in a van from Kfar Saba, near Tel Aviv. Every day, roughly 50 to 100 of Machsom's 400 women go out in 24 shifts to keep tabs on the remote outposts. According to Banai, Israel's checkpoints range from fixed stations, like the ones at Hawara and Beit Iba, near Nablus, to the "rolling checkpoints" that can spring up anywhere on the West Bank at any time.

"Our instructions to the women," says Banai, "are 'no cookies, no Nazis.' Don't befriend the soldiers and don't offend them."

The women's main task is to observe and

to write reports on what they observe, in order to make private acts of malice public. The reports are then published weekly on the organization's website ([www.machsomwatch.org](http://www.machsomwatch.org)) for all to read. Among the most loyal readers are officers and soldiers of the Israeli Army, who often, indignantly or plaintively, give their feedback.

Banai was not always so bold. Her first attempt at checkpoint activism, four years ago, brought her face-to-face with her own paranoia. An equally nervous colleague accompanied her. "We were scared out of our minds," she says. "In every Palestinian, I saw a Hamas person. They all seemed to have beards. Even the women. Every time someone made a move, I thought he was going to take out a knife and stab me."

The right attacks Machsom as subverters of Israel's right to decide where and how it draws the line of defense against terrorism. Banai agrees the government has a duty to defend its people against terrorism. Her own daughter was injured in a terrorist attack in Kfar Saba four years ago. But she cautions: "I see the looks of the young man at the checkpoints when his father is being humiliated, or he himself, or any woman. His eyes say, 'Give me

a bomb and I will blow us all up.'"

The women forced the military to install water taps and shaded areas at some checkpoints. Their intervention sometimes makes it easier for Palestinians to get where they want to go. "I have seen members of Machsom Watch making a difference," says Lucy Nusseibeh, director of MEND, an NGO dedicated to nonviolent resistance to the occupation. "They make a difference in terms of the treatment that Palestinians receive, and they are a reminder of a common humanity. Their bravery and commitment to justice, reaching across national boundaries, help too against stereotyping."

Yet Banai says she sometimes worries "if we are not actually collaborating with the army, making it all appear more human. No improvements can change the nature of the checkpoints. Israeli checkpoints on the West Bank are a violation of human rights. When you prohibit a Palestinian from seeing his dying grandmother, it doesn't much matter if you say it with a smile, or if you shout at him.

"I don't want the checkpoints changed," she says. "I want them gone."

—Robert Hirschfield

## appall-o-meter

### 3.1 Local Boy Makes Good

London tabloids are abuzz with the exploits of a young fraud prodigy who parlayed a \$38,000 inheritance from his deceased mother into a small fortune.

According to the *Daily Mail*, the con artist used part of his inheritance to amass a small library of how-to-grift guides and then got to work. Setting up a Web operation in his grandma's house, he began selling a range of goods from plasma TVs to office supplies, most of which he never delivered. He also leased office space he never paid rent on and hired dozens of employees whom he stiffed.

He plowed his profits into a dating website and a modeling agency, but he also splashed out for a high-stepping lifestyle. He developed a taste for expensive champagne, the company of hired escorts and luxury travel. He took to hiring bodyguards. He boasted of plans to buy a corporate jet.

"Despite coming from a relatively humble background, he became an outrageous snob," a source in the investigation told the *Mail*. "He claimed

public transport was for commoners."

All very interesting, you say, but how is this guy different from thousands of other go-getting assholes? He did it all when he was 13.

### 1.9 Corporate Clemency

Alabama jurisprudence reached a new milestone when Judge Kenneth Robertson Jr. of Attalla City sentenced two miscreants to sandwich-board penance.

According to the Associated Press, the judge ordered two shoplifters to stand in front of a Wal-Mart Supercenter hold signs reading, "I am a thief, I stole from Wal-Mart." The sentences, which were to last four hours on two successive Saturdays, were in lieu of 60-day jail stretches for the convicts.

Robertson was disappointed, however, when Wal-Mart officials begged the judge to let the shoplifters finish their sentences elsewhere. Apparently they were concerned about safety. "Upon



further review," company spokeswoman Sharon Weber said, "we simply would rather the punishment not be carried out on store property."

Translation: Easy on the peasants, your honor. It's bad for business.

### 2.0 Le Grand Mort

A tip to all you folks out there walkin' on the wild side: If you're videotaping a sex session and your partner happens to

expire *in media res*, turn off the camera before pocketing his drugs and calling 911. Really, it'll save you a lot of trouble later.

Unfortunately, this advice comes a little too late for Nicole Lynn Faller, 31. According to the *San Francisco Examiner*, the former Bay Area pole-dancer's lovin' was a little more than her paramour's 43-year-old ticker could handle. (Or maybe it was the meth the couple had been doing.)

—Dave Mulcahey



## NOLA: Priced Out of the Parade

**I**N 1875, AT the sunset of Reconstruction in New Orleans, the members of a mutual assistance society called Société d'Economie traveled together to events ranging from funerals to picnics wearing decorated uniforms, carrying an American flag and swaying to a brass band. The club members wanted to display publicly that, despite the erosion of their civil rights, they were black men committed to each other, and still American citizens.

The neighborhood folk always followed in the spirit of this march. They waved handkerchiefs and sometimes carried umbrellas. The followers were called "the second line." Their gestures and dancing movements originated in Africa, as the folklorist Alan Lomax showed in his film *Feet Don't Fail Me Now*.

Today, this tradition of prideful marching followed by dancing revelers is threatened by higher costs for parading and no city regulations that protect the culture, according to Tamara Jackson, president of the New Orleans Social, Aid and Pleasure Club Task Force. The clubs recently survived a threat of extinction brought about by higher security fees that police imposed arbitrarily on local clubs. Fees were in some cases triple the pre-Katrina costs.

According to the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, one club, the Original Pigeontown Steppers, whose name designates the neighborhood and the dance, was charged \$1,200 pre-Katrina for police escorts. This year, police requested \$7,500 before dropping the fee to \$2,400.

Representing the task force, the ACLU challenged the price rises for permit fees in U.S. District Court. The police and the task force came to an agreement on April 25 that the standard cost for fees in the future would be \$1,985 for five hours of security.

And the court ruled that the cost could not be raised for the 21 clubs that are members of the task force. But other clubs that weren't parties in the suit will need to negotiate with the police on their own. A better step, she says, would be enacting legislation to protect and govern all neighborhood clubs similar to rules governing Mardi Gras organizations.

## snapshot



**NEW YORK—Joe Baker, 63, smokes next to a shopping cart holding his belongings May 2, 2007, in New York City. Baker is one of the city's estimated 35,000 homeless people. Recent studies have found that, on average, 9,000 families with 14,000 children sleep in New York City shelters each night. (Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images)**

The second line marches matter. The parades of the black clubs in all their regalia—ranging from yellow suits and carrying ostrich feather fans, to tuxedos and top hats—are among the last, tenuous threads binding native communities to local traditions.

Still, this year some clubs have postponed their parades. "Others were not as flamboyant. People kept it simple," Jackson says.

The Young Men Olympians paraded in simple black and white outfits while the Men and Lady Buckjumpers were "blessed," she says, because the outfits they planned to wear in 2005, the year Katrina struck, were saved. So they wore their lime green, leather army fatigues as usual.

A second line parade is a joyous occasion. "The community lives for it," says Jackson. The march has taken on more importance since Katrina since locals now feel dismay over the pressures of daily life, she added.

Rents are high and finding a place to live in the city is difficult for many members of social clubs, which were the lifeblood of the community. "Housing is

still an issue," says Jackson. "A lot of club members have been displaced and need help in order to maintain the future of this culture." The task force is now getting government to work with clubs so that they are chartered as non-profits.

The clubs are also working to educate the community about their common traditions. The gestures in the second line dances date back to Africa. In New Orleans, the dances were documented in 1819 by Benjamin Latrobe in Congo Square where slaves came on Sundays. Their gatherings were shut down at various times, notably when the city authorities wanted more control. In 1893, the city renamed Congo Square to Beaugard Square in honor of the Confederate General.

But the children of slaves and free people of color continued to parade in organized clubs with names such as The Friends of Hope, Friends of Progress, Young Veterans and Perseverance. When they marched into the streets of New Orleans, they symbolized African-American pride under duress. That demonstration is as important now.

**—Fatima Shaik**

BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

## The Legacy of Tailhook



**I**T IS THE 15th anniversary of “The Year of the Woman,” as 1992 was billed. Spurred, in part, by their fury over how the all-male Senate Judiciary Committee treated Anita Hill during her testimony about Clarence Thomas being a crude sexual harasser, an unprecedented number of women ran for and won seats in Congress. Barbara Boxer, Diane Feinstein, Carol Moseley Braun and Patty Murray all won Senate seats; a year later, President

Clinton appointed a record number of women to government positions, including Janet Reno as the first female attorney general.

Such achievement rarely comes without a backlash, and 1992 was no exception. For this spring and summer is also the 15th anniversary of the Tailhook scandal. The actual event—the drunken Tailhook Association convention in Las Vegas, in which naval aviators formed a gauntlet on the third floor of the Hilton and trapped women in it, pawing and molesting them, stripping off their clothes—took place in September of 1991, but the scandal exploded the following spring as the press and the Navy itself revealed a massive cover-up. The night of the event, Paula Coughlin, an admiral’s aide and helicopter pilot, filed a complaint with a top aide to Secretary of the Navy H. Lawrence Garrett and two inquiries began, one by the Naval Investigative Service and the other by the Naval Inspector General. More assaults came to light. Yet the Navy’s April 1992 whitewashed reports identified only two suspects from approximately 5,000 Tailhook attendees. As 26 women, 14 of them officers, claimed to have been assaulted, these findings defied credulity, and Garrett was compelled to widen the inquiry.

By June of 1992, Garrett faced a full-blown scandal about the cover-up, including the fact that 55 pages of interviews had been omitted from the final report, including one that placed Garrett himself at one of the Tailhook party suites. Garrett resigned at the end of June, shortly after Paula Coughlin appeared on ABC News to describe her and the other women’s ordeal. Garrett’s replacement ordered a service-wide “stand-down” so that every officer and enlisted person would take a full day’s training on sexual harassment. Such training became standard in the military, and sexual harassment hotlines were set up to field complaints and answer questions about policy. (The Tailhook Association’s response was to retain a PR firm, and in 1999 its ties to the Navy were reestablished,

having been severed in the wake of the scandal.)

One argument that emerged after Tailhook was that men in the military would never respect women in the armed services or treat them as equals until women could serve in combat. In 1993, under the National Defense Authorization Act, Congress rescinded restrictions on women in combat and the Clinton administration opened 250,000 positions previously closed to women in the military.

Tailhook was a public event involving many women (and at least one teenage girl) at the same time. Such stories often have journalistic legs; when such incidents occur one by one, in private, they are deemed less newsworthy. But various reports indicate that women in the military today continue to endure widespread harassment and even sexual assault; it just happens in tents and outposts instead of the

Las Vegas Hilton.

Sara Corbett, writing for the *New York Times* magazine in March, documented the trauma female soldiers face from the debilitating combination of post-traumatic stress disorder from the war and sexual

**Women in the military continue to endure harassment and even sexual assault; it just happens in tents and outposts instead of the Vegas Hilton.**

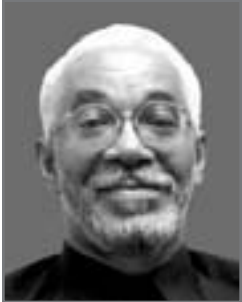
harassment or assault. Corbett also noted the inculcation of the “why bother” attitude among the women: Why bother to report sexual harassment or assault, as such complaints are looked down upon and only a fraction of them result in punishment of the perpetrator. The women she interviewed also recounted the hostility they frequently confronted: Said one, “You’re one of three things in the military—a bitch, a whore or a dyke.”

Corbett’s subjects aren’t atypical. A survey conducted by the Veterans Association reported that 30 percent of female veterans had been victims of sexual assault, and 14 percent of those had been gang raped and another 20 percent raped more than once. Sexual assault remains underreported in the military, but estimates based on surveys like this place the rate at anywhere from three to 10 times that for female civilians.

So why wasn’t Corbett’s story more widely picked up by other news outlets? Are these stories we can’t bear to hear in our guilt over having sent troops to Iraq under false pretenses? As everyone competes to claim they “support our troops,” accounts of the criminal behavior of a subset of these troops are almost too taboo to raise. Yet the silence comes at the expense of these women—brave, tough, self-sacrificing. So we should remember Tailhook, what it did, and did not, change in the military. And it would be nice to have a real “Year of the Woman,” not just for senators and First Ladies, but for all women, especially those willing to die for our country. ■

BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

## Blaming Hip-Hop for Imus



**P**ERHAPS IT WAS inevitable that discussions provoked by the words “nappy-headed hos” would come around to rap music and the culture of hip-hop. After all, hip-hop has taken the rap for just about every social ill: misogyny, gun violence, rampant materialism, anti-Semitism, gang warfare, even the decline of the NBA. Yes, to some extent, the insulting remarks of radio shock-jock Don Imus (who called the Rutgers Uni-

versity women’s basketball team “nappy-headed hos,” for which he’s been fired and subsequently sued) were drawn from a rhetorical subculture influenced by certain strands of rap music. But to focus on hip-hop as the instigator of our coarsening culture is a grievous misdiagnosis.

Hip-hop, at its best, reflects, distills, amplifies, deconstructs and re-contextualizes the social realities that are its raw material. The product of this creation then is reincorporated into that reality. Born in the ghettos of New York City in the disjuncture between the hopes of the civil rights promise and the harsh realities of economic disinvestment, hip-hop’s founding spirit expresses an insurgent rejection of business as usual.

Nevertheless, big business saw great profits in its growing popularity. Large record companies absorbed the independent labels and accelerated hip-hop’s profit potential. These companies changed the marketing emphasis from creativity to profitability, which shifted the focus to the more sensationalistic aspects of the genre rather than its politically charged or artistically challenging expressions.

Thus, sensationalized tales of drug dealing, sex seeking and gun play (by groups like Oscar winner Three 6 Mafia) find more corporate support than political rappers like Dead Prez or adventurous groups like the Perceptionists. This disproportionate emphasis on pathology has distorted hip-hop’s public face.

Thus, when Imus’ defenders blamed hip-hop for providing their man the vocabulary for his insult, many agreed. Oprah Winfrey’s entire response to the Imus affair was a two-segment “town hall” meeting on the state of hip-hop.

Even the Rev. Al Sharpton, president of the National Action Network and leader of the campaign demanding Imus be fired, has linked arms with those protesting demeaning lyrics in hip-hop. On May 3, Sharpton led marches on the corporate offices of Sony-BMG, Universal Music Group

and Warner Music Group’s to protest their promotion of demeaning rap lyrics.

“This is not about censorship—it is about standards,” Sharpton told the crowd at the march’s conclusion. “There’s a standard that says Ice-T can’t rap against police. There’s a standard that says you can’t rap about gays, and you shouldn’t. They had standards against Michael Jackson saying things anti-Semitic. Where is the standard against ‘nigger,’ ‘ho’ and ‘bitches?’” Sharpton is a long-time critic of what he considers degrading rap lyrics, but the momentum of the Imus controversy obliged him to raise his voice on the issue.

Others also have been forced to take action in the wake of the shock-jock’s fall. The Hip-Hop Summit Action Network (HHSAN), led by former Def Jam Records CEO Russell Simmons and former NAACP Executive Director Ben-

jamin Chavis, has announced a new campaign urging radio stations and other media not to air the words “bitch,” “ho” and “nigger.”

Chavis noted that the HHSAN directive is not for rappers to stop using the words.

“We don’t want to violate the First Amendment Rights to free speech,” Chavis told the National Newspaper Publishers Association. But other crusaders are not that fastidious. They want to force rappers to stop saying things they do not like. Like their fellow citizens, African Americans have to be reminded that the urge to censor is an authoritarian impulse.

One of the most salient aspects of both the Communist Soviets and Nazi Germans was their demand for artistic conformity. Of course, that should not deter the African-American community from agitating for respectful media depictions, for more responsibility from artists, or for holding record companies accountable for violating community standards.

Yet Russell Simmons, who sometimes seems in thrall to corporate interests, was on target when he told Oprah that we have to let rappers reflect what they see. “People who are angry ... and come from tremendous struggle; they have poetic license, and when they say things that offend you, you have to talk about the conditions that create those kinds of lyrics.”

In a black America that is largely fatherless, resource-starved mothers may come across as promiscuous gold-diggers to their proud but clueless sons, who may turn into rappers and tell their tales. We might better channel social resources if we listened more attentively to those tales. Granted, too many performers are “false flagging” their woes for profit, but there’s still plenty of wheat amidst the chaff. ■

**We must remember that the urge to censor is an authoritarian impulse. As Russell Simmons pointed out, we have to let rappers reflect what they see.**

# WATCH FOR THIS MAN

INCORRUPTIBLE, WISE, SIMPLE OF SPEECH

❖ He will advocate sharing the world's food and resources more equitably among nations...

Every year millions of people die needlessly from starvation, disease, and war. Millions more struggle to survive on less than \$1 a day. As long as this injustice persists, we will never know peace.

❖ He will call for massive emergency relief...

An immediate program to provide basic necessities for the poorest areas of the world—perhaps in the form of a global Marshall Plan—will be the first of many changes needed.

❖ He will turn our attention to the environment...

Pollution is the #1 killer in the world today, and new reports say the consequences of global warming will come sooner and be more catastrophic than expected if we fail to act in time.

❖ With his help we will see that all life is one...

Acting as one human family, we will rebuild our world along more just and compassionate lines, and thus create the only basis for lasting peace.

❖ His public work will soon begin...

As millions worldwide take up his call for peace through sharing, he will acknowledge his role as World Teacher, the one awaited under different names by people of all religions and by those who simply wish for a better life for all—a Teacher for all humanity.

## WHO IS THIS MAN?

[www.TheEmergence.org/itt](http://www.TheEmergence.org/itt)



BY H. CANDACE GORMAN

## Locking Attorneys Out of Guantánamo



**I**N RECENT WEEKS, disastrous court decisions have set back the cause of the hundreds of men and boys languishing in Guantánamo. The U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington D.C. has ruled that the Military Commissions Act (which strips Guantánamo inmates of habeas corpus rights) is a viable law, and the Supreme Court has told us Guantánamo attorneys that we must work within the framework of the Act before the Court will determine

whether it is constitutional. The question before us: Can we salvage any of the miniscule progress we have made in the Guantánamo litigation given these disastrous decisions?

The government is using the appellate court decision and the Supreme Court's inaction to try to keep us habeas attorneys away from our clients. In the coming weeks we will find out if they are successful.

To recap, our since-booted Republican Congress passed the Military Commissions Act (MCA) last October. The law established one-sided procedures for those few individuals who were going to be charged with something at Guantánamo. It also eliminated habeas corpus (the right to challenge unlawful imprisonment in a court of law) for those who were not going to be charged (98 percent of the detainees). Those men will have no recourse but to sit at Guantánamo until they are sent elsewhere. More than 80 men currently languishing in Guantánamo have been cleared for release by the government's own review boards.

That part of the law—stripping habeas corpus retroactively—is surely unconstitutional. Of course, the Republican Congress didn't care, and our Supreme Court has said it is too early to review the law. For the Bush administration, this is a stall game. The strategy is to keep the place under lock and key until the next administration, while continuing to attack the attorneys.

The assault on habeas counsel began in January when Cully Stimson, then Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Detainee Affairs, went on a government radio program armed with a list of the big law firms whose attorneys are representing detainees at Guantánamo free of charge. His plan was to publicize the list and ask the corporate clients of those firms to choose between their corporate clients and their Guantánamo pro bono work. Stimson suggested that corporate clients should disengage law firms whose attorneys represented Guantánamo inmates, and even insinuated

that firms were receiving money from shadowy (possibly terrorist) sources. The strategy backfired and Stimson was forced to resign. But this incident was only the beginning.

Next in line was the military attorney assigned to represent David Hicks, an Australian who is one of only two men to be charged under the MCA. A plea deal was worked out and Hicks was sentenced to nine months for his "terrorist" activities (after more than five years of torture, isolation and other abuses). Since Hicks was given no credit for time served, he languished for five years only to be sentenced to nine months.

Just weeks before Hicks' commission hearing was set to begin, the chief prosecutor for the Guantánamo military commissions, Col. Morris Davis, went after Hicks' military lawyer, USMC Major Michael Mori. Davis suggested

Mori should be brought up on charges for speaking out against the Bush military commissions. Mori was doing a very effective job of representing his client (as shown by Hicks' savvy plea deal). He was also spending time in Australia,

appearing in the media and doing advocacy work on his client's behalf. Davis' message to the military attorneys was loud and clear: If you represent detainees zealously, you do so at your peril.

The government has now launched its latest attack, moving to dismiss all of the Guantánamo cases now pending and changing the rules that have allowed attorneys like me to visit and communicate with our clients. The government has claimed in court that we are fostering unrest and (gasp) acting as a conduit for the media. The government has asked the court to enforce new rules that will grant us only three visits to our clients. Under this new regime, the government would reserve the right to read every communication between Guantánamo inmates and their attorneys.

If the government succeeds, it will put us back in the days when Guantánamo was a legal black hole. We will not be able to discuss our legal and diplomatic strategies in letters because our strategies will be known by the government and sabotaged before they can get off the ground.

However, the scariest development has already occurred. As the government claims in a recent filing: "no court has jurisdiction over conditions" at Guantánamo. If no court has jurisdiction, that leaves the Bush administration free to both set the rules and monitor them. ■

**H. CANDACE GORMAN** is a civil rights attorney in Chicago. Adrian Bleifuss Prados, her law clerk, contributed to this column.

**The government has claimed in court that lawyers of Guantánamo inmates are fostering unrest and (gasp) acting as a conduit for the media.**

# Not by Spin Alone

In the battle over reproductive rights, on-the-ground organizing is far more effective than massaging the message

BY LAURA FLANDERS

**L**ISTEN TO NATIONAL DEMOCRATS and you'd think that when it comes to preserving legal abortion, the answer lies entirely in messaging, framing and spin. Since the Democrats' defeat in 2004, liberals have invested a mountain of money and time on recasting their message on abortion (among other things). Hillary Clinton now uses her husband's phrase about keeping abortion "safe, legal, and rare" and takes it one step further, calling abortion "sad, even tragic." At last month's Democratic presidential contenders' debate, Barack Obama cast his pro-choice plan as a commitment to a "culture of life." Likewise, many women's groups have gone from talking about liberation and rights to abstractions like "privacy" and "choice." NARAL (the National Abortion Rights Action League) changed its name to NARAL Pro-Choice America to avoid the nasty word "abortion." But campaigns aren't won on spin alone. Just ask the right.

The right has rhetorically outflanked the pro-choice movement, hijacking the words "family" and "life" and "human" to devastating effect. But the "pro-life" activists have outpaced their opponents in other ways too. They've cultivated a network of grassroots lobbyists, lawyers and legislators who are successfully advancing their agenda from the state level up. Instead of focusing on framing the issue, Democratic leaders should concentrate on the message that is in the frame, and creating a way to get that message out.

**I**N FEBRUARY 2006, the South Dakota legislature passed an abortion ban, HB 1215, that criminalized abortion in every instance, with no exception for rape or incest, and no exception for a woman's health. South Dakotans rallied, gathering 38,000 signatures to put what became Referred Law 6 on the ballot. Come November, voters had to vote yes (to uphold Referred Law 6) or no (to repeal it).

The group responsible for the ballot

Keeping abortion safe, legal and accessible requires local action.



initiative campaign was the South Dakota Campaign for Healthy Families, directed at the time by Lindsay Roitman. Roitman arrived in the state in July, from Seattle, (where she'd worked in the corporate office of Starbucks). She had to move fast to get the lay of the land. Sixty-five percent of South Dakotans live outside of metropolitan areas; communities are scattered, resources are few. When HB 1215 was passed, South Dakota boasted just one statewide women's organization with a core group of 25 to 50 members. The right-to-life movement, on the other hand, was well established. In state primaries in 2006, right-wing Christians challenged moderate Republicans in 17 races and won every time.

Roitman hired a team to conduct focus groups. "I was taken aback by some of the attitudes we found," she says. Most of the South Dakotans surveyed opposed abortion, but many agreed that HB 1215 was too extreme. Healthy Families decided to focus their efforts on cities, the non-native population and swing voters. On TV, in campaign literature and

in talking points their slogan was: "This Law Simply Goes Too Far." Asked what would happen if the ban was defeated but its supporters returned with an amended version, with rape or incest exceptions tacked on, Roitman sighed: "I can't correct years of failure in just four months with \$2 million."

South Dakotans describe a situation not so different from that laid out by Thomas Frank in *What's the Matter with Kansas?* As jobs and resources have trickled out, the Christian right and its anti-government allies have poured in. In the last 30 years Theresa Spry, a Lakota grandmother living in the far western part of the state, has seen her hometown, Rapid City, lose jobs, health care centers, quality public schools and money for public services. By the time the backlash movement showed up, it was like a tide flowing onto a bulldozed plain.

Spry worked as family planning coun-

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*This essay is adapted from Blue Grit: True Democrats Take Back Politics from the Politicians (Penguin Press).*

selor “until the environment for that kind of work became too severe,” she told me. “The religious right walked in the door and took over. In one decade, evangelicals took over the school board, the city council, the county commission, the legislature.” HB 1215 wasn’t passed overnight. Indeed, in 2004, Gov. Mike Rounds vetoed a bill that was very similar to HB 1215, but new bills kept on coming.

**I**T’S THE SAME across the country: those on the right and the left don’t only have different political views; they do politics in different ways. The money on the liberal side floods in and out with the election tide, focused on the White House, Congress, the Supreme Court, or, as in the case of South Dakota, emergency campaigns like an all-out abortion ban on the ballot. In terms of support and financing, national organizations pretty much write off pro-choicers in red states, even though they are on the front lines of the anti-abortion fight.

Julie Burkhart, executive director of the Kansas pro-choice group KANDO, told me: “If we’re going to take this issue away from the Right, we have to do it now and do it methodically and think about the future. ... What we need are leaders who’ll stand on principle, leaders who’ll stand up.”

And such leaders are needed at the local as well as the national level. Barbara Santee, retired executive director of NARAL Pro-Choice Oklahoma, had to close her organization’s doors a few years back because so little trickled down from the national office. “They were keeping their money for federal races and they just gave up on us because we are in a red state,” she says. “Which made us blue state people purple—with rage.”

Victories in such places are not impossible. In the same week this April that the Supreme Court upheld the Partial Birth Abortion Act, organizers in Oklahoma succeeded in defeating a sweeping anti-abortion bill thanks to their local, not national, networks. Locals have the know-how to pull off victories, says Santee. “It’s just so frustrating to live here and not get the help we need.”

Abortion rights groups are not outspent; they gave more than \$1.4 million in the 2004 election to candidates for national office. In addition, Emily’s List raised \$2.5 million in 2006 for female candidates who support abortion rights. The National Right to Life Com-

mittee, the largest electoral outfit on the criminalization side, raised and spent only about \$1.7 million in 2006. But the opponents of abortion rights sow their grassroots year-round through their networks of right-wing churches and state-based women’s organizations, including Eagle Forum and Concerned Women for America.

As one pro-choice organizer told me,

## **‘Those who are the most threatened are the most likely to fight,’ says Kierra Johnson of CHOICE USA. ‘It’s absurd to leave them on the sidelines.’**

“We’ve gotten very good at mobilizing our members—mowing our grassroots while the other side keeps sowing sod.”

The conversation about abortion needs to change, but the top-down message strategy is only a tiny piece of a much larger problem. Lynn Paltrow, founding director of National Pregnant Women’s Advocates, puts it this way: “For a long time, most of our organizations have done a terrific job focusing inside the courts—once a bill is passed, they’re right there to challenge it. But the intrepid grassroots activists are out there on their own.”

Across the board, women of color are the poorest and have the least access to health services, yet they are ignored by the national advocacy networks. Language is important, says Eveline Shen of Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice in the Bay Area, but having authentic networks and credibility is more important: “The Democrats and the reproductive rights movement can say whatever they like, but if they don’t have the connections to the communities, it’ll make no difference.”

The same goes for young women. Kierra Johnson, development director of the young women’s group, CHOICE USA, told me, “Those who are the most threatened are the most likely to fight. It’s absurd to leave them on the sidelines.”

Paltrow puts it this way: “The way we talk about things does matter, and it matters because you can either inspire or not, convert or not, motivate or not.”

**R**EPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS HAVE been eroding in South Dakota for years. Even before the no-exceptions abortion ban, South Dakota granted full legal status to the fetus and imposed all

manner of restrictions on women seeking to abort. HB 1215 was one of five bills passed in 2005 and 2006 that restricted abortion, including the one that requires doctors to tell women that abortion ends the “life of a whole, separate, unique living human being.”

I asked Theresa Spry, “What was happening on the other side during all this time?” She replied, “What other side?”

The Democratic establishment of South Dakota has been cowed. In 1992, state Democrats dropped from their platform any commitment to a woman’s right to choose. In 2006, six out of 10 Democrats in the state senate and seven out of 19 in the house voted for the no-exceptions abortion ban. During the party conventions that year, Republicans made abortion a central theme of the race and conservative advocacy groups pledged their help in dollars and volunteers. Democratic state leaders, on the other hand, discouraged candidates from making abortion an issue and approached the midterm elections in a decidedly low-key manner. The one independent pro-choice advocate—Kate Looby, South Dakota director for Planned Parenthood—was asked to leave the state party convention.

In the end, the South Dakota abortion ban was defeated, but the legislators who voted for it were not. The anti-choicers hold as much power as ever. Theresa Spry ran for the state senate in 2006, winning a four-way primary, but she was defeated in the general election by Bill Napoli, a backer of the ban who, when asked under what circumstances abortion might be permissible, babbled something about a raped Christian virgin who was “brutalized and raped, sodomized as bad as you possibly make it and impregnated.” Clearly, Napoli’s not too bothered about cautious “spin.”

Spry has run for office before, and says she’ll do it again. It’s not just the law, it’s the legislature, that has to change. “We can’t give up. We just need a long-term plan,” she says. “There’s a long term plan on the other side. What’s ours?” ■

# Hello, I'm a Democrat.

Meet the netroots activists who have moved offline  
and into political office

By Conor Kenny

**A** LOT OF INK HAS been spilled and many hands wrung over the Democratic “netroots”—those citizens who blog, make on-line campaign contributions and “friend” their chosen candidate on MySpace. Washington-based media types are perturbed by the scrutiny and competition. Politicians want to harness these partisans to spread their message and, more importantly, serve as an ATM to bankroll their campaigns.

Most netroots activists, however, don't live in Washington nor do they give a hoot what its wise men—or even most members of Congress—think they should be doing. While they are engaged to one degree or another in the national-level actions and organizations, many of the most committed and involved activists are busy transforming the Democratic Party from the ground up. Unnoticed by the punditocracy, a series of small revolutions have rolled across the country at the township, county and state level.

If there were a kickoff event for this movement, it would have been Howard Dean's February 2004 announcement that he was dropping out of the presidential primary. In that speech, the one sentence that had the least to do with his candidacy may end up having the most impact on his political legacy:

We want to encourage you out there in the grassroots effort: run for office, support candidates like you who run for office, and we will use this enormous organization to support you as you run so we will change the face of democracy so that it represents ordinary Americans once again; government that will not be bought and sold.

Four days later, a Dean staffer posted this challenge on the campaign blog: “You can send a strong message to the party and media by demonstrating that you are not giving up, and [show] how serious you are about taking back the soul of the Democratic Party—you can, in one week, recruit and identify 100 new Democratic office seekers inspired by

Dean.” Within a week, 110 had signed up. And five weeks later, Dean announced that his campaign organization, rechristened “Democracy for America” (DfA), was supporting 400 Deaniacs seeking elected office.

In the ensuing three years, these Dean supporters, together with newcomers from the Wesley Clark and John Edwards camps, have gotten elected not only as county commissioners, city councilors, and state senators, but as precinct captains, and state and county party chairs. Their commitment to openness, organizing and infrastructure development has combined with now-Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean's “50 State Strategy” to begin realigning the party from an organization focused on electing candidates in competitive districts to one that seeks to engage and expand the party's grassroots base in every county in every year, election or no election.

## From netroots to grassroots

Anna Brosovic was one of the 110 volunteers who immediately answered Dean's call to arms. A 33-year old information technology worker from Arlington, Texas, Brosovic had never really volunteered for the party or a candidate until after the 2000 electoral meltdown in Florida, which “shocked” her and sent her scouring the Internet for sympathetic voices.

Brosovic found DeanNation, an unsanctioned blog. There, she started talking with other Democrats upset by the Bush administration and the buildup to the Iraq war, and by September 2003 she had become a site administrator. DeanNation allowed readers to talk to each other through blog posts and comments, use Meetup.com to organize real-world rallies and meetings, and make contributions online—all before the official campaign did.

After Dean dropped out, Brosovic decided to run for the chair of her precinct, a position within the Tarrant County Democratic Party, only to find the seat vacant. As for the rest of the party organization, “you would have thought it had rolled over and died,” Brosovic says. Now a precinct cap-



tain, she was joined by other Dean, Clark and Edwards supporters, who promptly put their energy into the Kerry/Edwards presidential campaign. In 2006, they focused on local, county and state legislature campaigns, electing the first Democrat in their Texas house district in 14 years and sending Brosovic to the state party convention as a county delegate.

Their tactics combined technological savvy with a commitment to shoe-leather organizing. They used their website's interactive calendar, contribution form and action center to communicate among themselves. On statewide blogs they exchanged tactics and ideas with other activists. Using databases of voter registration records, they "basically [went] block-walking every night to let the voters know that we are Democrats in their neighborhood," Brosovic says. "We're not going to take their votes for granted and we're going to answer to them."

The Tarrant County Democrats are now optimistically focused on the 2008 state and local elections, recruiting candidates, holding fundraisers and walking their blocks. Since 2004, the attendance at the monthly county party executive committee meetings has grown from 50 to 125, with most of the growth coming from those who would fit some definition of "netroots." But in Tarrant County, like in many other areas of the country, it is hard to distinguish the "netroots" from the "grassroots."

### Resistance from the old guard

Even after significant wins in 2006, many Texas netroots activists thought the state party was holding them back. In their eyes, the party wasn't organizing and building an infrastructure to support a base that remained active outside election season. In interviews, they said the party had given up on Republican-dominated areas (a sentiment shared by activists in several other states) and lacked a commitment to progressive policies.

Mario Champion puts it this way: "The state organization is basically funded and controlled by a group of trial lawyers. They set the agenda, which, granted, is solidly pro-union and anti-Republican, but it's



Anna Brosovic



Mario Champion



Chris Bowers



Jeremy Horton

still *their* agenda. It's not based on what the grassroots and netroots are saying. We had no ownership of it and no input."

So Champion and friends decided to take over the party.

They began working to elect Glen Maxey, a former state legislator who had run the Dean campaign in Texas, as state chair. Maxey ran on a platform of devolving power to the local party organizations and increasing fundraising to pay for technology purchases, organizers and candidate trainings. While the delegates to the state party convention technically elect the chair, for the last 20 years the main body had rubber-stamped the selection of the nominating committee, which was controlled by an inner-circle of party funders.

Six months before the June 2006 convention, Maxey and Champion, using the netroots networks from the 2004 election, called upon every available person to run as a convention delegate. After the delegate elections they whipped together enough votes to place their allies in a majority of the spots on the nominating committee, guaranteeing Maxey the official nomination.

Once the convention began, however, it became apparent that the old guard wasn't going to give up without a fight. Its candidate, Boyd Richie, an attorney and longtime party official, had been installed as interim chair several months before. When the nominating committee convened, he used his authority to jettison netroots-backed members by appointing them to different committees and replacing them with his own supporters.

"All these whispered conversations started in the room and soon people were just being told they weren't on the committee anymore," says Champion, who was on the committee. "Our people were on the phone with election lawyers trying to find out what the rules and bylaws said, and pretty soon we had lost the majority on the committee."

With the committee deadlocked, neither Maxey nor Richie won the sole nomination. Several hours and a runoff vote later, Richie won, 52 percent to 48 percent.

### Taking on the machine

Texas activists aren't alone. Netroots Democrats in Philadelphia are locked in

## Paula Villescaz

**Profession:** High school senior

**Party Positions and Activism:** California Democratic Party Convention delegate, Sacramento County Democratic Central committeeperson, California Young Democrats organizer

**Blogs at:** DailyKos, Calitics

Villescaz's first serious foray into Democratic politics occurred last summer when she attended the state party convention as a volunteer and saw a speech by Charlie Brown, a netroots-supported Congressional candidate challenging an entrenched Republican incumbent in Northern California. She immediately signed up as a campaign volunteer.

"All these people were telling me I shouldn't waste my time because he was a such longshot," Villescaz says, "but he was an engaging speaker and really inspired me."

After showing a flair for managing the campaign's financial data, she was hired as a finance assistant, working out of Brown's house alongside the rest of the shoestring campaign staff. When school started in the fall she decided to stick around.

"I arranged my schedule so I could get off early in the afternoons and headed over to Charlie's house to crunch spreadsheets until they basically kicked me out and told me to go home."

Villescaz started posting on Calitics and DailyKos about the campaign and rallied netroots activists online to get Brown voted in as one of the "DfA All-Stars," which would allow him to raise money nationwide from DfA members.

After Brown narrowly lost, she ran this January for a seat on her local county party committee, earning the privilege to attend this year's convention as an official delegate. Villescaz, who is 18 years old, hasn't figured out where she's going to college, but she intends to work for another campaign in 2008 and is attending a session of the traveling DfA Training Academy on how to run campaigns.

a fierce fight for control of the city's Democratic organization, though their motivations have as much to do with good governance as winning elections.

Chris Bowers is a Philadelphia activist and professional blogger for MyDD.com (as in Direct Democracy), a national netroots site. A former union organizer whose first foray into partisan politics was volunteering for Dean in 2004, Bowers says he got involved locally because "no one from the Democratic Party had ever contacted me about any election in the nearly seven years I had lived [here]." And he was fed up. "The government here just basically sucks because city services are run based on loyalty and patronage," he says.

In the local Democratic primaries, which determine elections in blue Philadelphia, party leaders endorse candidates at every level of city government. The endorsement has a price—a mandatory "donation" that ostensibly covers the costs of printing the party sample ballot. For example, local judgeships go for \$35,000, with another \$1,000 to \$2,000 for the leaders of each of the city's 66 wards.

"Eighty percent of those endorsements are made with no public meeting or debate," says Bowers.

In 2005, a reform movement coalesced around two organizations: a DfA group, Philly for Change, and another reform-oriented group with roots in MoveOn called Philadelphia Neighborhood Networks. Their first target was the May 2006 election of the city and state party committees. At first, the old guard took it in stride. One city commissioner told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* the effort would fail because they had neither patronage jobs nor money to reward loyalists. Then the old guard panicked and launched a counter-operation that included legal challenges to candidates and an Internet operation that would, as one official described it, "fight the bloggers on their own turf."

Though they failed to gain control, reform and netroots candidates captured about 200 seats on the city party committee and more than half the seats on the state executive committee. Since then, they've been targeting

the 2007 Philadelphia city government primary elections, which took place as *In These Times* went to press.

Bowers got appointed to a precinct-level city committee in 2005, and in 2006 he won a write-in campaign for a spot on the state party committee. He says his main project will be to demystify the process of electing party officials. Before activists recently tracked down and distributed it, there was a lack of information on how to run for city party positions, who the existing officers were, and where meetings were held—a common complaint of activists in other states.

### Allies within the structure

Last fall in California, netroots activists faced a similar dearth of information that some ascribed to gatekeeping by the party leadership. Fresh off campaigns for underdog congressional candidates, these activists were frustrated with what they saw as a lack of investment in traditionally red areas of the state, the top-down leadership of the party and an emphasis on elections at the expense of building a permanent infrastructure and base.

So they ran as delegates to the state party convention, countering the lack of information by posting what they found on the Calitics.com blog and by building a special site that explained how to run. In blog posts and YouTube stump speech videos, the 32 "blogger candidates" signaled their defiance by employing "throw the bums out" rhetoric.

What they didn't realize was that some of those bums were potential allies, says Judy Hotchkiss, a 35-year party activist, Dean supporter and Democratic State Central committeeperson. "A lot of us had been working on reforming and opening up the party since we came in with McGovern in the '70s," she says. During the '80s, Hotchkiss' cohorts had forced the Democratic politicians who controlled the party to open up to directly elected delegates, and in 2005, they worked with Dean supporters to standardize delegate election regulations, which played a large part in enabling the blog candidates to run.

"A lot of people saw the party as closed and non-transparent and want-

ed to ‘crash the gates,’ but there were clearly people already inside who had been fighting to open the party up,” says Matt Lockshin, one of the 25 netroots candidates elected to the state party convention in January. “There wasn’t necessarily a hardcore cadre of people who wanted to exclude us, but structurally there wasn’t enough of an effort to engage people and there was a lack of awareness of the things they were doing to keep people out.”

Indeed, while a distinct old guard versus outsider dynamic exists in some places, activists and party officials across the country say that in most states the reality is much grayer. In Republican upstate New York, for example, when energetic Dean supporters began restarting inactive local party organizations, they were welcomed by Denise King, a fellow upstater who happened to be both chair of state party’s executive committee and the former head of the state’s 2004 Dean campaign.

### Moving into the red areas

Whether inspired by Dean or the other way around, one of the activists’ central tenets is the need to build the party in red areas abandoned by the state parties and, in the case of the DNC, entire states.

Upon election as DNC chair in 2005, Dean implemented a “50 State Strategy” to send staff, technology and funding to the state parties to boost infrastructure, and put organizers in areas that hadn’t seen one in decades. This has been a boon for states like Kansas, where state party chair Larry Gates says the program has helped them effectively double their staff and open a storefront in a quickly growing part of the state. (Gates says he’s “thrilled” by the Deaniacs who have showed up and started taking leadership roles in the party.) Even parties in bluer states like Washington have benefited. State Party Chair Dwight Pelz, who worked on Dean’s campaign there, says the program enabled him to send another field organizer to the state’s heavily Republican eastern side.

With this infusion of capital and expertise from the DNC, whose fundraising operation dwarfs most states, established state party leaders

have found common cause with the activists.

“Dean’s message of how we need to build a national party has made him immensely popular in the state parties and their leadership,” says King.

In North Carolina delegates to the state convention elected a new party chair in 2005. They bucked the candidate backed by the governor and other party heavyweights for Jerry Meek who told them the “state party has lost touch with the local party,” and who promised to “create a party of inclusion where grassroots workers have a real say and power isn’t just limited to the Raleigh insiders.”

Meek, a wealthy attorney and the sitting state party vice chair at the time, was no outsider. However, in his time as a party official he had made frequent trips to the virtually abandoned western parts of the state to hold trainings, fundraisers and listen to the county chairs and precinct captains.

“What you have seen in the Dean race and races like Arkansas, where a 34-year-old defeated an incumbent state chair, is that people who are perceived as the insiders lost and people who were perceived as grass-roots advocates prevailed,” Meek told the *Raleigh News and Observer* after his victory. “There is a strong feeling in our party that that is the direction we need to go.”

### Eyes on the prize

All the warm talk about democracy and empowerment isn’t only a feel-good way for the netroots activists to set themselves apart from the machine politicians. It’s also about winning elections. Or as DfA executive director Tom Hughes says, “This is about taking our country back.”

Democracy for America, now chaired by Howard Dean’s brother James, has reoriented itself to support races at all levels across the country. It modified Dean’s presidential website to allow activists to use their social-networking and fundraising functions for grassroots candidates, and it started a traveling weekend training academy to teach campaign fundamentals like field organizing, fundraising and media messaging. It even hosts a free online “Night School” version for candidates who can’t at-

## Jeremy Horton

**Profession:** Librarian

**Party Positions and Activism:** Director and co-founder of Change for Kentucky, Chair of 2004 Dean campaign in Kentucky, Democratic Party State Central Executive Committee member

**Blogs at:** ChangeforKentucky.com, DailyKos

“I was always politically interested and involved, but I’d never really *done* anything in politics before 2000,” Jeremy Horton says. After Bush’s election, Horton went online and found the Dean movement.

“It was really only half about the candidate. The other half was that you could get involved in the campaign; you were allowed to do things,” Horton says.

He went to the first meeting of Dean supporters in Lexington, organized through Meetup.com, in March 2003. By that December, he was the chair of Dean’s Kentucky campaign, helping coordinate the statewide effort to get Dean on the ballot. But even before Dean dropped out, Horton and others began talking about how to keep their 5,000-strong email list active after the election. To them, the party was closed off to outsiders and in many countries run by the party bosses as their own patronage fiefdom.

“There was almost no way to get involved,” Horton said. “I didn’t even know how to contact my county party.”

Horton and his fellow activists started Change for Kentucky as a shadow organization to the state party. In 2004, they began organizing around getting elected to party positions—training candidates and distributing flyers explaining the party structure and how to run. The old guard panicked and creaked into action, but the Change activists, who were concentrated in Louisville but loosely allied with activists in Lexington, still managed to pick up a third of Louisville’s 300 precinct captain spots.

Horton is now a member of the state party’s executive committee and Change for Kentucky is focused on elections and uses the online services provided by DfA to help fundraise, train and organize candidates. And they are still working from the neighborhood level up, holding house parties and walking their blocks, voter registration files in hand.



tend in person. The focus, in contrast to the 2004 get-out-the-vote operations, is on giving local candidates and volunteers the help they need to run a successful campaign.

"The lesson from the Dean campaign in Iowa was that you can't parachute into areas and tell people what to do,"

them fully participate as by his opposition to Bush and the war.

Last year in California, Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.), head of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC), the fundraising arm for House candidates, made an attempt at a "bossed" primary by en-

pyramid of public support," says Matt Stoller, a blogger at MyDD.

### Fresh horses at the gate

Whether the netroots will be able to fully dislodge that top-down approach remains to be seen. The movement's numbers rank in the tens of thou-

## All the warm talk about empowerment isn't only a feel-good way for the netroots activists to set themselves apart from machine politicians. It's also about winning elections.

says Lockshin, the San Francisco-based activist who helped inland California activists with their successful 2006 campaign to unseat Rep. Richard Pombo (R-Calif.). "But, if you have skills in setting up a fundraiser or a website or something else, you can go teach people how to do it themselves."

Activists from the Bay Area, a hotbed of netroots activism already dominated by Democrats, mobilized to help the locals backing Pombo's challenger, Jerry McNerney, as well as unsuccessful northern California candidate Charlie Brown. Without much financial or logistical support from the state party, the Bay Area activists communicated with each other through blogs and, in person, on weekend trips that took their empowerment philosophy on the road.

Other netroots-enabled victories included those of freshman Democratic Reps. John Hall and Kirsten Gillibrand in upstate New York. In both cases activists started anti-incumbent blogs and were organizing before there was even a clear Democratic candidate, allowing them to hit the ground running with established field and communications operations.

### Partners, not footsoldiers

Probably the biggest barrier standing between the netroots and the party leadership is the latter's insistence that it knows best. Many if not most of the new activists who came in with the Dean campaign were motivated as much by his commitment to letting

dorsing Jerry McNerney's opponent in the primary. The move backfired and only served to motivate the activists supporting McNerney, who were incensed by this outsider attempt to "run over the grassroots."

A similar situation occurred when Emanuel backed the primary opponent of Carol Shea-Porter, who eventually won both the primary and the general election to oust Republican Rep. Jeb Bradley (N.H.). As one campaign volunteer described it in a post on DailyKos:

Things were a little bit grim in Camp Carol, until the DCCC endorsed [her opponent], then everything changed. Many NH Democrats, particularly on the seacoast, were angered by the intrusion into our process by the national party. ... So many viewed the DCCC endorsement as simply them endorsing the candidate with the largest war chest. ... Beating back this its-all-about-the-money approach to politics energized our volunteers. This became more than an effort to win one house seat, it became a mission about the democratic process."

While the DNC and the leading presidential candidates have embraced many of the web-based, social networking tools of DfA and the Dean campaign, most national party leaders have yet to let the grassroots share the reigns.

"The presidential candidates have slightly different tactics but they are all using the same top-down approach where every decision is filtered through a small group of cautious decision-makers sitting on a large

sands, not millions. They also have yet to overcome—and in many ways even address—the under-representation of women and African Americans in its leadership.

But, they are growing in numbers and influence, and they have an ally in Howard Dean, who is committed to remaking the party in their image. They are also solidly plugged in to national organizations like MoveOn and have begun building an offline infrastructure to rival the online one through the growth of the local party clubs and the 2,000 bar-based chapters of Drinking Liberally, a loosely knit social club for progressives.

In coming years, netroots activists will be moving up from local party positions to state and national ones. And, while they are more progressive than the party as a whole, first and foremost they are committed Democrats who want to win, and who are willing to put in the money and the time to make it happen. Though their outsider identity may sometimes cause them to break the door down rather than ask for a key, they want to help.

Asked what she hoped would happen in Texas once the dust settled, Anna Brosovic thought a bit and then quoted a line from an activist in *Crashing the Gate*, the bible of netroots power building written by the founders of MyDD and DailyKos: "Some of you in the Democratic National Committee may see us as the barbarians at the gate. Some of us see ourselves as the cavalry. The truth is, we're fresh horses." ■



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# Dancing Into the Majority

Once alienated, grassroots activists are finding ways to work with the Democratic Party establishment

BY ADAM DOSTER

**W**HEN MICHAEL HEANEY SERVED as a special guest to the Brookings Institution's Governance Studies Program in the fall of 2002, he couldn't ignore the growing anxiety surrounding the invasion of Iraq. After marching to the White House with a local CodePink chapter and attending larger rallies in D.C. that year, the budding political scientist—now an assistant professor at the University of Florida—took an interest in the makeup of the antiwar movement. "I just started noticing all of the organizational diversity of people there," he says, "and I got very interested in understanding the differences between these organizations, how they mobilize people, what they wanted and how they framed their arguments."

This curiosity led him to team up with Indiana University sociologist Fabio Rojas, and together they coined the term "Party in the Street" to describe a "set of individuals and organizations that are both part of a grassroots social movement and that identify and work with a political party."

Their research, to be published in July in *American Politics Research*, found that many left-leaning Americans navigate between social movements and the Democratic Party. In surveys distributed at large rallies and conventions in 2004 and 2005, Heaney and Rojas discovered that a plurality of antiwar activists identified as Democrats (40 percent) or articulated some willingness to work with or vote for the party (39 percent). On the other hand, 20 percent of participants identified as members of a third party, which implies that they think organizing under the Democratic tent is counterproductive. From this data, Heaney and Rojas conclude that many social movement activists are beginning to embrace the opportunities the Democratic Party provides in order to achieve their loftier movement goals.

Radio host Laura Flanders, who explores grassroots insurgencies across the



Demonstrators attend a peace rally held by CodePink on March 8, 2003, in Washington, D.C.

STEFAN ZAKLIN/GETTY IMAGES

country in her new book *Blue Grit: True Democrats Take Back Politics from the Politicians* (excerpted on page 18), recognizes this phenomenon as well. "Organizations that for years would have defined themselves as movement groups that eschewed electoral politics and never expected to get anything from politicians are deciding to get involved," she says.

## Swelling the ranks

Numerous factors contribute to the recent surge in grassroots political organizing, but popular frustration with the Bush administration is central. Heaney points to "a deep dissatisfaction with the direction of our country, especially with the way President Bush responded to 9/11 and the way that the Iraq war [has gone] and all the mistakes that were made and lies that were told." The political momentum created by war protesters also helps activate people to fight other injustices perpetuated by Bush and his Republican cohorts, as shown by the immigrant-

rights marches held in cities across the country.

But it's not only anger with Bush that is causing movement-partisan organizations to expand. Lackluster leadership from establishment Democrats, many of whom remain timid on economic and social issues and hawkish on the war, has galvanized disillusioned Democrats and outside activists alike to seek another political path.

"We've learned from issue after issue, going back to the Clinton era and earlier, that electing Democrats is just not enough to move our society forward," says Jeff Cohen, founder of Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting and a media adviser to the Progressive Democrats of America (PDA), a progressive political organization and a grassroots PAC operating inside the Democratic Party. "You need to elect Democrats with backbone and with principles."

Indeed, more and more progressives who refused to support spineless Democrats and instead backed unsuccessful third-party candidates have come to

understand the pragmatic necessity of working within the Democratic Party.

In an electoral system based on winning a plurality of votes, rather than some form of proportional representation, Democrats hold a striking advantage over outside challengers. "In a study of the percentage of Socialist or Social Democratic party members in national legislatures across the world, only South Africa had less—zero—than the two who made it to the [U.S.] House of Representatives a few times in the first quarter of the twentieth century," G. William Domhoff, a sociologist at the University of California, Santa Cruz, notes on his website. "More leftists were elected to Congress in the '30s and early '40s as Democrats ... than were ever earlier elected as socialists." The only way for progressives to beat Democrats, then, is to join them.

### PDA's innovative approach

That's the goal of PDA, perhaps the national organization that most closely reflects the model posited by Heaney and Rojas. Founded in Roxbury, Mass., during the 2004 Democratic National Convention—primarily by delegates and activists from the campaigns of Howard Dean and Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio)—PDA is attempting to carve out a space for progressives in the Democratic Party.

The members of this grassroots association are going about that task using a strategy they call "Inside/Outside," meaning PDA runs candidates and lobbies members inside the Democratic Party while allying themselves outside the electoral arena with organizations that work to promote its five stated priorities: ending the Iraq war, universal health care, fair and clean elections, economic justice and environmental sustainability.

"I see Inside/Outside as absolutely essential," says Bill Honigman, PDA's California state coordinator. "There are going to be times when the party needs to be shook up a little, and the only way to do that is from the outside. By the same token, you can't do it all from the outside. You have to be involved in the party to change things when it's going the wrong way."

Dean's influence on PDA's structure is hard to ignore. At the local level, PDA hopes to set up individual chapters in all 435 congressional districts. This tactic is similar to the "50 State Strategy" Dean has employed as DNC chairman, which focuses on organizing Democrats in every voting precinct at all levels of government. So

far, PDA National Director Tim Carpenter says that the group has established chapters in 120 districts, which he describes as at least "five folks coming together, pulling papers and meeting at least once a month." As in all substantial bottom-up organizing, their progress is slow, as evidenced by the dearth of local councils in less popu-

while at the same time running or endorsing candidates in certain circumstances. However, unlike the national Democratic Party, the goal is not nominal electoral majorities; PDA aims to transform the party into one dominated by progressive politicians, not corporate interests.

Through its willingness to apply more

## More and more progressives who once backed third party candidates have come to understand the pragmatic necessity of working within the Democratic Party.

lated states like Delaware and Wyoming. But residents elsewhere are expressing great interest. Florida has 13 chapters and California now boasts 23 locals along with close allies in the state assembly's Progressive Caucus.

PDA also follows the fundraising model of the 2004 Dean campaign, relying almost entirely on sustainer donations that average \$22 a month. These local chapters are where the action occurs, allowing PDA to organize in support of congressional actions or in response to lackluster representation. "We're trying to develop the grassroots so that we build up all of our communities and not just focus on ones that classify as swing districts," says Honigman.

In many ways, PDA has assumed the role of a party within a party by coordinating collective efforts of like-minded activists

public forms of pressure like press conferences and teach-ins, PDA has earned national recognition. It was one of the first groups to publicize the infamous Downing Street Memo, which exposed another layer of White House deception in the run-up to the war, and it rallied activists around Ohio's voting irregularities in 2004. Members also pushed in early 2007 for a congressional debate on a fully funded withdrawal of all troops and military contractors from Iraq.

On the inside, PDA was active this past election season in various Democratic campaigns, including John Hall's victory in New York's 19th District. The local PDA chapter raised awareness of John Hall's progressivism by organizing events throughout northern Westchester County. Hall's press secretary Tom Staudter later credited

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PDA with generating vital momentum. While other PDA-endorsed candidates were not as successful, such as Christine Cegelis in Illinois' 6th District (who lost the Democratic primary by four percentage points to Tammy Duckworth, the favorite of the party establishment), PDA organizers think their local electoral organizing is laying the groundwork for sustainable influence down the road. "Chapters were organized prior to the campaign," says Carpenter, "they endorsed that candidate and at the end of that race they were stronger and more chapters came out of them."

## Other movement organizing

PDA is not alone in its efforts. A variety of national organizations are simultaneously engaging in electoral work and standard movement organizing.

One prominent group is CodePink, the feminist antiwar group that was founded in 2002. Named with the Department of Homeland Security's color-coded alert system in mind, CodePink is known for its non-violent direct action campaigns. For example, in November 2002, CodePink members began a four-month vigil in front of the White House to oppose the

Iraq invasion and have since repeatedly protested at high-profile political hearings and fundraisers.

But a focus on local organizing and building institutional movements links CodePink with groups like PDA. In four years, CodePink has established more than 250 local chapters, each of which runs autonomous campaigns and actions in their own communities while receiving ideas and assistance from the national unit. These campaigns include lobbying members of Congress and coordinating diplomatic visits, such as a program that sent a delegation of 15 women to Iraq to meet with local women and hear their stories.

"There is this Beltway culture," says Dana Balicki, CodePink's media coordinator. "And we are hammering at it to make sure there's a real element of public discourse."

Another prime example is the fledgling Aurora Project, spearheaded by Bill Fletcher, Jr., founder of the Black Radical Congress and a Belle Zeller Visiting Professor at Brooklyn College, City University of New York. Fletcher looks to Jesse Jackson's campaigns for president in 1984 and 1988 as models. Jackson and his allies, Fletcher says, promoted "a vision of a non-party

political organization that could operate inside and outside the Democratic Party and had a very broad tent within which progressive social movements could find a place but where people of color did not get lost." Jackson's coalition took a less democratic shape than originally hoped, but for many of those involved, the potential of the model remains.

Like PDA, Aurora Project organizers hope to build local electoral organizations that are networked nationally. However, unlike many other movement organizations, issues involving race and gender factor prominently into the Aurora Project platform.

"Organizations, given the history of the United States, do not have the option of taking a pass on race if they want to build a majoritarian movement," says Fletcher. "Attempting to build a bloc that avoids it invariably ends up failing or stumbling at the minimum." Last December in Washington, D.C., more than 50 experienced activists met to discuss strategy at the Aurora Project's founding meeting. Organizers are currently traveling around the country talking with local leaders about their plans, which, according to Fletcher, have been met with enthusiasm.

Even MoveOn, an organization whose leadership focuses more on national issue advocacy than organizing the grassroots, has spawned 200 active local chapters through its electoral fieldwork and Internet technology. Similar to PDA, these autonomous groups hold public educational events and participate in national advocacy campaigns while fostering relationships with their congressional representatives, bridging their outside activity with electoral organizing.

"A number of members of Congress have met with our [local councils] because it's clear that these are some of the people who are influential in the district," says Eli Pariser, executive director of MoveOn. "It's very exciting to start to see influences in engaged citizens rather than the local crew of lobbyists."

## The path ahead

The Party in the Street is music to the ears of lefty lawmakers, many of whom now hold key committee and subcommittee chairmanships but have not had an organized, national grassroots arm backing their congressional battles for quite some time.

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Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC) and movement-partisan activists are quickly developing and provide mutual benefits. For example, when a legislator proposes a favorable new bill, organizers immediately contact their local representatives to seek out co-sponsors. And the broad networking ability of these groups raises awareness about issues for which progressive legislators are fighting. "I think that when they get their membership to start sending emails, it puts on the radar screen issues that many members might otherwise not be thinking of," says Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), who founded the CPC while a member of the House.

But as Sanders' insistence on running as an independent suggests, the Party in the Street model presents serious trade-offs for its members. "Their ties to the Democratic Party are both their greatest strength and their greatest weakness," says Heaney. While aligning closely with Democrats allows for easier recruitment of politically socialized members and access to Washington leadership, groups can grow disconnected from their membership or experience co-optation.

Navigating that liminal space could be the largest obstacle for the Party in the Street's success. Members of social movements often advocate morally principled but legislatively impractical causes while Democrats seek sound political victories, sometimes undermining justice in the name of compromise. As Heaney notes, people balancing between the movement and the party—which don't always see eye to eye—are in a precarious position. "There is that force in the party which is trying to pull people out of the social movement and there is a force in the social movement that's trying to pull people out of the party," says Heaney. "In a sense, they are not two institutions that go together real easily."

This fear was dramatized in March when some in the anti-war movement lambasted MoveOn for its actions on the Iraq Accountability Act. Polling its members, MoveOn asked if the organization should back Pelosi's phased troop withdrawal plan, which was up for a congressional vote. In doing so, they ignored a bill sponsored by Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), which was never brought to the floor for a vote, but that called for immediate troop withdrawal. Other anti-war groups, such as United for Peace and Justice, and CodePink, saw this sole focus on Pelosi's bill as a compromised one—one that was more

in sync with the will of the newly accessible Congressional leadership rather than the country at large.

"There is a danger that you can be so supportive [of Democrats] that you no longer have a balanced view of what's really happening," Balicki says. "If you get too far inside the Beltway, you can be sucked right in."

**'There is that force in the party that is trying to pull people out of the social movement,' Heaney says. 'And there is a force in the social movement that is trying to pull people out of the party.'**

There's also a danger of alienating potential allies, especially members of third parties who are skeptical of Democratic partisan motives. "The problem with PDA and MoveOn and others," says Scott McLarty, media coordinator for Green Party USA, "is that by focusing on the rehabilitation of the Democratic Party, which I think is a hopeless prospect, they don't allow for the possibility of a new kind of politics."

But if members of organizations like PDA can master that balancing act, the model could succeed in building a progressive majority in the United States. One unlikely inspiration could be the activists who occupy a similar, albeit more established, organizational space on the right. Groups like the Christian Coalition have cultivated a regimented mass organization focused on local organizing that has successfully pushed their principal issues to the forefront of the GOP agenda while remaining independent of the party. To emulate that success, progressives must remember that Democratic electoral victories are not ends unto themselves; only through a focus on sustained, local mobilization and leadership development can progressives begin to shift away from issues-based pressure groups that have dominated left politics since the '70's.

Democratic primaries could provide a natural arena for the Party in the Street to assert its influence. "By putting your maximum program out there and challenging in primaries," says Domhoff, "you have a chance to reach the general public."

But as Flanders notes, organizations like PDA must also "work outside of its comfort zone." It's a sentiment shared by Fletcher, who notes "a recurring problem in progressive circles, where they come to be dominated by what can best be de-

scribed as white economic populists. But when it comes to issues of race and gender, there's a soft peddling in the way of bringing us all together."

Constructing a broader and stronger progressive tent includes establishing vibrant chapters in communities of color and in historically Republican districts, two constituencies often taken for

granted or ignored by national Democrats. Carpenter was enthusiastic about inroads PDA has made in "red districts," but expressed pessimism about progress in heavily black or Latino locales, something he says PDA is actively addressing through its Diversity Caucus and by assembling a racially diverse executive board.

The kids can't be ignored, either. As Heaney and Rojas document, the Party in the Street "is composed mainly of the young (18 to 27) and the old (46 to 67), with relatively fewer participants outside these ranges." Energetic young folks are playing a crucial role organizationally and at the polls, meaning that special attention should be paid to youth recruitment and leadership training.

Perhaps most important, movement-partisans must support and run candidates with bold policy initiatives that will excite an electorate that's increasingly cynical about government. And intra-party debate should be encouraged. As MoveOn's Pariser puts it, "A diversity of opinions is a strength." But only by formulating a strong progressive platform that addresses the concerns of middle- and working-class Americans can movement-partisans avoid political obscurity and shift the Democratic Party to the left.

Groups like PDA cannot yet contend with the influence of more established, corporate-friendly bodies like the Democratic Leadership Council. But if organizers follow the model they have devised and remain open to self-criticism, the Party in the Street might give a lot of progressives reason to dance. "Every great social movement begins in the street," says Carpenter. "But it ultimately ends in the halls of Congress." ■

# Whose Subsidy Is It Anyway?

Farmers take the heat, but Big Ag reaps the farm bill benefits

BY DAVID MOBERG



**T**HE FARM BILL, WHICH Congress will likely vote on this fall, will affect environmental, consumer, industrial, trade and anti-poverty policies as well as the prices and subsidies farmers receive for producing commodity crops such as corn, wheat and soybeans. Legislators are now conducting hearings and reading proposals, but the outcome is “more up in the air than it has been in 30 to 40 years,” says senior policy analyst Dennis Olson at the Minneapolis-based Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. A small opening exists for a new progressive farm policy based on some old principles.

## The winners

Conventional wisdom says that the villains in farm policy are American farmers, who have in recent years collected about \$20 billion a year in subsidies. But the government provides the subsidies because commodity prices have been so

low that most farmers would have gone bankrupt without them. And prices have been low because legislators have written farm policy to drive those prices down to aid big business rather than farmers—or anyone else.

“The important thing for policymakers and the public to be clear on is that the people who get checks written for them under the farm bill are generally not the beneficiaries of those programs,” says Timothy Wise, deputy director of the Global Development and Environment Institute at Tufts University. “So the obvious question is: ‘Who benefited?’”

Consider for a moment Big Chicken—not the tacky 56-foot high tourist attraction near Marietta, Ga., but the industry that turns out more than 16 million tons of poultry each year. Once highly diversified, with nearly every farm producing chickens, the industry is now highly concentrated: The top four processors, led by giant Tyson Foods, control more than 56

percent of production.

Tyson and other giants have consolidated their power by purchasing chicken feed for, well, chicken feed. As soybean and corn prices dropped 21 percent and 32 percent, respectively, after the passage of the 1996 farm bill, the chicken industry effectively collected a subsidy of \$1.25 billion a year, according to Tufts researchers Elanor Starmer, Aimee Witteman and Wise. The subsidy—worth \$2.59 billion to Tyson from 1997 to 2005—represents the savings for the industry compared to paying for the full cost of producing the grain in its feed.

The cheap, subsidized grain also gave big factory farm operations an edge over diversified family farmers. By feeding animals their own grain rather than buying government-subsidized grain on the market, these farmers have to pay the full cost of producing grain they feed to their livestock. Politically, however,

it remains “hard for farmers to make the case that they’re not the welfare cases,” says National Family Farm Coalition Executive Director Katherine Ozer, “but it’s Tyson and Cargill that are the real welfare cases.”

Big Chicken is not alone. International grain traders (like Cargill), industrial users of food and fiber products (ranging from the biggest users, the livestock and meat industry, to processors like Archer Daniels Midland and the vast array of junk food manufacturers), and the corporate producers of seed, fertilizers, equipment and other farm inputs all profit from overproduction and low commodity prices. Even after a long history of consolidation, tens of thousands of independent farm operators still must compete with highly concentrated agribusiness corporations that have the power to set both prices of products sold to farmers and prices paid for farmers’ products.

“You’re talking about a huge savings in

a huge industry that never is getting a subsidy check written to it," says Wise. Until biofuel demand recently drove up prices, most farmers sold corn or soybeans for less than it cost to produce. Government subsidies covered only some of their financial loss, and many had to take jobs off the farm to make up for their farm losses.

Grain traders then sold that corn and soybeans abroad at below-cost prices. Such dumping drives millions of peasants off their land. The displaced peasants flood urban labor markets and thus depress wages. Their exodus from the land also fuels waves of immigration to more developed countries, including the United States—where many get low-wage jobs processing chicken.

### Workers, small farmers and consumers

Farmers who produce 90 percent of all chickens in the United States work under contracts with the big processors. The processors own the chickens and dictate how they are raised. They also require that the farmers make major investments, suffer most of the market risks and typically make poverty-level incomes. Farm-

ers also face the danger of losing their contracts on a whim. Mississippi poultry growers Roy and Nelda Gatlin, for example, claim that in 1997 Sanderson Farms, Inc., unfairly terminated their contract on the basis of a complaint that proved untrue, destroying the Gatlins' business.

Most workers on the farm and in chicken processing plants, increasingly new immigrants, lack union representation and earn around \$8 an hour, for jobs that pose grave threats to their health and safety. But workers and other victims of agribusiness are fighting back. The United Food and Commercial Workers continue to organize at a giant Smithfield pork processing plant in North Carolina, despite widespread company violations of labor laws. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers recently forced McDonald's to guarantee higher pay for tomato pickers (see "Doing It For Themselves," p. 33). The Campaign for Contract Agriculture Reform, a group of more than 200 local and national farm and agriculture groups, is lobbying to change this year's farm bill to protect rights of contract farmers, who now account for 36 percent of all agricultural production.

Consumers count as partial winners:

They get cheap chicken, even if much of it is contaminated with salmonella, antibiotics and other undesirable pollutants. As the world's biggest chicken producer, the United States is also the leading exporter of chicken, particularly those parts other than the breast meat that Americans prefer, which is sold overseas at rock-bottom prices. Those dumped exports in turn decimate the chicken industry in many developing countries.

Tally it up. Losers: farmers, farm laborers, food processing workers, rural communities, the environment, poor country peasants, many developing country agricultural industries, urban laborers in both developed and developing countries facing wage competition from rural migrants and U.S. taxpayers. The winner: corporate agribusiness.

### History of the farm bill

During the Great Depression, the federal government adopted many of the ideas of Franklin D. Roosevelt's progressive secretary of agriculture, Henry Wallace. Wallace argued that the farm market is different from other markets and requires regulations that manage how much land is

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planted or kept in reserve. Managing supply, with the aid of an inventory of stored commodities, conserved the environment and smoothed price hikes and slumps.

The farm market is different because it's so basic to people's lives. Demand is only modestly affected by prices—one can only

used unlimited exports for farmers who planted "fence row to fence row." Then, the 1996 farm bill ended the old policy of managing both prices and production through a system of loans, target prices and stored surpluses. Instead, it provided subsidy payments to farmers that were

## **Progressive farm experts and advocates say that the government should return to supply management and at the same time bring anti-trust lawsuits against corporate agribusiness.**

eat so much. And thousands of independent producers make a decision, which can't be changed once a crop is planted, and then depend on weather to determine their success. When prices drop, farmers may shift crops, but they rarely take land out of production, as a manufacturer might close down a production line in slow times. If market slumps drive some farmers out of business, other farmers will simply buy up their land and expand.

In the mid-'60s, the government began to abandon supply management. Nixon's Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz prom-

"decoupled" from production. The intent was to wean farmers steadily from all support. But when prices crashed, pressure for subsidies was politically irresistible and continued with the 2002 legislation, despite criticism from other countries that such subsidies violated global free trade agreements.

### **What's next?**

Progressive farm experts and advocates say that the government should return to supply management and at the same time bring anti-trust lawsuits

against corporate agribusiness. They want to expand measures to protect the environment, encourage better nutrition and help farm workers. Unfortunately, on Capitol Hill, corporate agribusiness lobbyists and campaign donations rule.

The Bush administration has proposed to leave the basic farm bill principles intact, but reduce subsidies. Rep. Collin Peterson (D-Minn.) and Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) will take the lead in pulling together Democratic alternatives in the House and Senate. Neither legislator is likely to fully embrace the Food from Family Farms Act, developed by the National Family Farm Coalition and supported by many progressive groups, but some of the core progressive ideas may enter the legislation.

The surge in biofuels, pushing up prices of corn and soybeans, "has really shifted the whole debate," Olson says. Most agribusiness interests want to push prices back down. They could do that by eliminating the tariff on ethanol imports. Cheap Brazilian ethanol would undercut the domestic industry, reducing demand for, and thus the price of, corn.

On the other hand, the Congressional Budget Office projects no need to budget for subsidies, assuming that agricultural commodity prices will stay high. But Congress made a similar, incorrect assumption about higher prices in 1996, and simply eliminating subsidies now without guaranteeing a floor for grain prices could be disastrous.

Olson says that Congress could write the farm bill to subsidize the development of a new sustainable cellulosic ethanol market, which would encourage the construction of farmer- or community-owned ethanol plants that would guarantee fair prices for farmers. The government could expand conservation programs and at the same time encourage production of sustainable crops, like perennial grasses, for ethanol. It could also create a reserve for both food and fuel needs. Such a strategy could stabilize prices for both farmers and consumers at a reasonable level.

Clearly, the field must not be left to the agribusiness and energy giants. Should that happen, the biofuel boom could turn out to be a variant of the story of Big Chicken: good for big business, bad for everyone else. It depends on whether the 110th Congress recognizes that farming is too important to leave to the whims of the market and the power of agribusiness. ■

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# DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers turns 'corporate social responsibility' from oxymoron into reality

BY MISCHA GAUS

**T**HE FLORIDA TOMATO PICKERS of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) rolled into Chicago in blustery April, ready to stand before McDonald's corporate headquarters and press their demands that the fast-food behemoth take responsibility for the miserable way its tomatoes are farmed.

It proved unnecessary. As more than 1,000 tomato pickers and their allies wound their way to Chicago, McDonald's unexpectedly agreed to all of the coalition's demands. The groundbreaking settlement will almost double salaries for farm workers, reveal where the company buys its tomatoes and create a monitoring plan expandable to other corporate buyers. McDonald's capitulated two years into the campaign, and on the eve of the coalition's call to boycott the company. It followed a similar deal the coalition signed in 2005 with Taco Bell's corporate parent after a four-year boycott.

The 3,500 members of CIW are mostly Mexican, Guatemalan and Haitian immigrants, many of whom left indigenous communities to work the fields of swampy southwest Florida. They have become a force far beyond their numbers. (And their agreements are good news for the roughly 6,000 transient tomato pickers of Immokalee, all of whom receive the higher wage if they pick fast-food tomatoes, regardless of whether they're CIW members). In expanding its agreements to another fast-food giant, CIW proved the durability of its strategy—the creation of private regulations to remedy the ills of a neoliberal economic order that is unwilling or unable to negotiate political settlements.

In achieving those agreements, CIW has crafted a new pattern for civil society's tango with corporations, this time with activists in the lead. Two interlocking dynamics made possible CIW's détente with the largest fast-food chain on the globe. McDonald's is seeking to burnish

its brand image after absorbing decades of assaults on every segment of its business. The tally of sins is long: aggressive marketing to children, monoculture cropping, horrendous factory-farming, systematic violation of labor laws, clearing rainforests, enabling obesity and attempting to gag critics who point out such things.

The CIW, on the other hand, found in McDonald's a fulcrum to shift the fast-food industry by creating a code of conduct authored by farm workers and watched over by independent monitors. The idea is borrowed from the anti-sweatshop movement that eight years ago launched a similar strategy in establishing the Worker Rights Consortium, which tracks and investigates overseas garment factories producing university apparel.

This approach combines a monitoring plan outside corporate control, with the necessary transparency to verify progress, and a wage boost for the people at the point of production. Immokalee's farm workers are testing just how much leverage activists can have over companies that claim to champion social responsibility, and whether corporate image vulnerability can be exploited to spread the tomato pickers' remarkable advances.

## Lessons learned

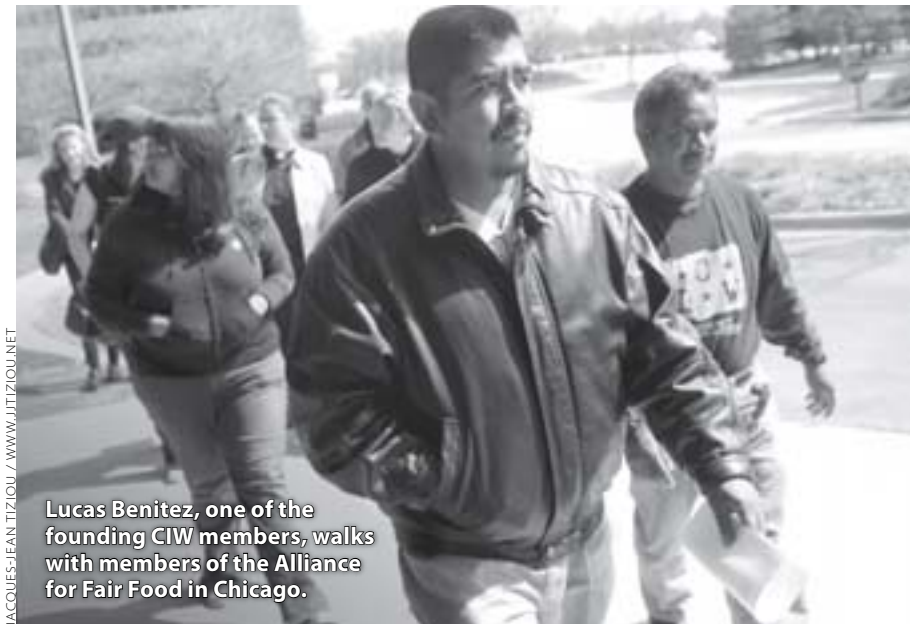
Exacting concessions from corporations used to be harder. The Farm Labor Organizing Committee, which unionizes farm workers by forcing individual growers to respect the right to organize, led a boycott and strike of Campbell's soup for eight years in the '70s and '80s before the company finally relented.

And McDonald's has a record of outmaneuvering its opponents. Lois Marie Gibbs, head of the Center for Health,

**From the top: Juan Antillon, farmworker and member of the CIW; Flavia Garcia, member of the CIW and tour participant; Alvaro Francisco, farmworker and member of the CIW.**



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Lucas Benitez, one of the founding CIW members, walks with members of the Alliance for Fair Food in Chicago.

Environment and Justice, an anti-toxics group, remembers tense meetings with the company's executives during the late '80s. The Center was spearheading a campaign against the fast-food giant's Styrofoam clamshell burger containers, and the company was finally bending after three years of pressure. McDonald's offered Gibbs a compromise: Call off the campaign, and they'd build small incinerators at flagship stores. They had a prototype mocked up, and it even had a name: "Archie McPuff."

From that tone-deaf beginning a more sophisticated response soon developed. Gibbs says McDonald's trolled the major environmental groups and found the Environmental Defense Fund (now called Environmental Defense) willing to join in a formal partnership to "green" the company. Environmental Defense studied the company's packaging, and produced a "Waste Reduction Plan." Critics argued that the study's results showed nothing that would not have been known to McDonald's before. Nonetheless, McDonald's announced the end of the styrofoam era and accepted plaudits for its august sense of responsibility, thus neatly deflating a consumers' revolt. "The citizens' campaign dropped off almost immediately," Gibbs says.

The CIW avoids that fate by emphasizing that its campaign doesn't finish with the corporate target of the moment, but when the fast-food industry is restructured to treat the people at the bottom of the production ladder fairly. It's no small order, says John VanSickle, an economist

who studies the tomato industry at the University of Florida.

The long-term contracts and rigid uniformity demanded by big institutional buyers like Taco Bell and McDonald's make them easy targets, VanSickle says. Submitting to the demands of the CIW will cost the company less than \$1 million, a spokesman told the *Chicago Tribune*, not a huge sum for a firm that made a \$3.5 billion profit last year.

McDonald's says it purchases 1.5 percent of Florida's tomatoes. But overall, according to VanSickle, fast food represents less than 10 percent of the overall tomato market, and three-quarters of the nation's tomatoes are grown outside of Florida. Other major tomato buyers, supermarkets and restaurant chains will prove harder to contend with because they spread their purchasing among many suppliers.

"Once you go to these smaller producers," VanSickle says, "to get them to monitor and audit, to get the premium back to harvesters, is difficult."

The CIW began in 1993 by targeting individual tomato growers, who refused to budge after years of pressure. It's a lesson not soon forgotten, says Julia Perkins, a CIW staff member. The proven way to change conditions in the fields, she says, is focusing on the only force individual growers respond to—the brand straddling the top of a supply chain. With the grocery market consolidating, the CIW won't lack for easily identifiable targets.

"We know Whole Foods buys these tomatoes," says Sean Sellers, co-coordina-

tor of the Student Farmworker Alliance, a CIW sister group. "We know Wal-Mart and Costco do, too."

## Papering over the market

The wave of social movements washing over the corporate bow does not please everyone. "Managers, acting in their professional capacity, ought not to concern themselves with the public good. ... [T]hey lack the democratic credentials for it," sniffed *The Economist* in a 2005 story on the dangers of corporate social responsibility. And that raises the question: If legislatures fail to respond to public pressure, is engaging with corporations the best way left to advance social change?

Dean Baker, an economist and director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, says that while activists always risk co-optation, they can use corporate campaigns to mitigate business' worst behaviors. "It's not the only tool by any means," he says, "but when you look at what tools are available, you get 'em where you can get 'em."

Despite the honeyed words of "social compliance" officers, the literature of the business-school set is clear: Ultimately, the diktat of corporate social responsibility is to protect the brand's reputation and control threats to sales and supplier relationships. In Europe, for instance, McDonald's has introduced organic milk and banned genetically modified food. Without effective state regulation or strong NGOs driving public antagonism here, corporations like McDonald's haven't taken such ethical considerations across the Atlantic. "Global brands, whether it's McDonald's or Adidas, view labor rights issues not as a moral question but as a risk management question," says Scott Nova, executive director of the Worker Rights Consortium. "They will make change to the extent that risk to their brand reputation justifies making change."

Unless corporate social responsibility programs surrender power to affected communities and workers, the new regime of monitoring and codes of conduct will prove ineffective. "The result is at best managerial paternalism," writes Pun Ngai, a Hong Kong academic who studies Chinese factories' adaptations to corporate social responsibility. At some level, activists have themselves to blame for the failings of social compliance. The initial voluntary standards and certifications arose largely from governmental and NGO initiative, not from corporations sensing a market

opportunity or acting to protect reputation, says Tim Bartley, an Indiana University sociologist who researches corporate social responsibility. These voluntary measures tied in neatly with neoliberalism, which champions self-regulation over public standard-setting. What's more, corporations quickly learned that self-regulation was a model over which they could exert control.

The result has been a jumbled map of certification schemes and PR blitzes, leaving consumers to wade through information about corporate behavior without any way to separate the disingenuous or delusional from the decent. The CIW fought off an attempt last year by McDonald's to defuse its campaign through such a Potemkin-village maneuver. Working with a Florida agricultural trade group, McDonald's created an industry front called Socially Accountable Farm Employers (SAFE) that issued a competing monitoring plan—without bothering to consult the tomato pickers. "SAFE isn't going to stand up because it lacks worker input in design and implementation," Perkins says. "You can't do social responsibility on the cheap."

The raft of corporate good-news propaganda has at least one advantage, activists say. It opens new points of leverage against their targets. "Less than a decade ago, farm animal concerns were considered far outside the mainstream," says Paul Shapiro, who leads the Humane Society of the United States' farm animal campaigns. "Now it's within the mainstream. No company wants to be in the position of defending abusive practices and being seen as out-of-step."

## Becoming an irresistible force

Tomato pickers aren't exactly a class of workers used to a sense of entitlement. Because they receive less than 1.5 pennies per pound picked—a rate that's stayed constant for 30 years—workers must hoist on average two tons of tomatoes a day to make \$60. Federal surveys of Florida farm workers put their annual incomes at about \$10,000. "If you can get

leaders in the community. Every summer, a watermelon pickers' co-operative of 15 coalition staffers and full-time pickers slowly works its way north, dividing work and wages equitably. By cutting out the traditional crew leader, the co-operative doubles each picker's wage—to around \$150 a day—and embarks on an exercise in practical political education.

"This is a workers' co-operative in the

## Corporate self-monitoring has left a jumbled map of certification schemes and PR blitzes, leaving consumers without any way to separate the disingenuous or delusional from the decent.

a job in construction, landscaping, you take it," says Sellers. "Picking tomatoes is one of the lowest rungs of the employment ladder in the United States."

Legislation stretching back to the 1935 National Labor Relations Act has created two-tier systems of work (as would the current Gutierrez-Flake immigration bill) and excluded farm workers from the right to union representation. Benefits like overtime pay, health care and sick leave don't exist for farm workers.

Against those odds, the CIW demanded a transformation of work life—and began within its own organization. Staff members keep their salaries on par with what tomato pickers earn. Since its inception, the CIW has run a food co-op providing basic necessities in an area where grocery stores ran up prices because few workers had transportation to seek out cheaper goods. And in an industry with pandemic turnover, the coalition found ways to keep

context of Southern agriculture," says Sellers, who has picked watermelons the last two summers and plans to again this year. "When does that happen?"

The farm workers also have side-stepped the limitations of their progenitors, the anti-sweatshop and fair-trade movements. Efforts to end sweatshops have been overwhelmed by the constant pressure apparel brands exert on suppliers to reduce prices, Nova says. The WRC, like the farm workers, is pursuing a strategy that would assure workers receive a livable wage by giving well-behaving factories better-paying contracts. The idea of funneling higher wages to people who bring goods to consumers in rich countries is borrowed, of course, from the fair-trade movement. But unlike fair trade, the CIW and anti-sweat campaigners are attempting to force corporations to pay more to production workers across entire industries, instead of carving out a niche through certification schemes that allow companies to slap a label on products.

The coalition has the ear of those astride the market. When asked in February whether they would support the coalition's demands, Burger King declined, offering the tomato pickers work in its restaurants instead. Irritated, the coalition pointed out their members already had jobs. The country's second-largest burger chain shrugged, dispatching its spokesmen to say they simply couldn't dictate terms to their suppliers.

After McDonald's folded, however, the directives from fast-food corner offices became more measured. In mid-April, a Burger King spokesman said the company was "always ready to talk ... and see what we can work out." ■



Gerardo Reyes-Chavez warms up the crowd at a CIW demonstration outside a Burger King in the Chicago suburbs.

JACQUES-JEAN TIZIOLU / WWW.JITI.ZIOLU.NET



BY LAURA S. WASHINGTON

## Curiosity and a Cat Named Studs

By the time you read this, Studs Terkel will have had a *big* birthday. On April 16, a month before he turned 95, I visited his stolid brick home in Uptown on Chicago's north lakefront. While he's had his "ups and downs" in recent months, his eyes still twinkle with the promise of more stories to tell.

He waved me over to his customary spot, a rumpled chair in a sun-drenched corner of the living room. Studs was suited up in his trademark red-checked flannel shirt and red socks. A hefty stack of newspapers and magazines spilled over a table nearby. Perched perilously atop it sat the final manuscript of his upcoming (and first) memoir, *Touch and Go*, just back from his publisher, The New Press.

Studs says much of *Touch and Go* was dictated over the telephone to Sydney Lewis, an author and his longtime assistant. The book, a tribute to his abidingly sharp and perceptive recall of history, is dedicated to his son Dan, also a writer.

The inexhaustible nonagenarian has penned more than a dozen books, among them *Working*, *Hard Times*, and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Good War*. His oral histories and singular radio interviews chronicle a crazy quilt of stories—those of celebrity icons, but even more compelling, the tales of ordinary people.

This is Studs' story. *Touch and Go* spans the 95 years of his life mosaic: vaudeville performer, radio DJ, vaunted storyteller, historian, rooming house denizen and advocate for the downtrodden.

That spring afternoon, he gave *In These Times* a sneak preview.

**Ninety-five. Did you think you'd make 95?**

I'm genetically a cardiac case. My father and my two brothers died in the '50s. I have lived 50 years longer than my two brothers and my father. My heart's OK,

that's the amazing thing.

**When is the book coming out?**

It's coming out sometime in September.

**Oh, that's not too long. So you have to stick around for that.**

This is it.

**So this is your life story, finally.**

There's an ironic, and very funny, secret to my success: my ineptitude, mechanically. I can't use a machine, or drive a car. And I make mistakes on the tape recorder. Now the tape recorder was important to two Americans, I think, more than anyone else. To myself and Dick Nixon. I call Dick Nixon and me the New Cartesians, as in Descartes [Rene Descartes, the 17th century philosopher and mathematician]. The Latin phrase is *cogito ergo sum*—"I think, therefore I am." In the case of Dick Nixon and me, it's, "I tape, therefore I am."

In my place, I tape therefore *they* are. Now who is the "they?" The "they" are the non-celebrated celebrities, the people who have never been asked about their lives before.

**You wrote about people like that in *Working*.**

My subjects helped me. Here's a guy, comes in with a tape recorder and I goofed up. And so when I goofed up, they helped me. Now that's the secret. To feel *needed*. I needed them. For the first time in their lives somebody said, "I need you. You count."

**You had a long radio career.**

I became a disc jockey before the word disc jockey was used.

But mine was different. I would play anything. A Caruso record, something by a Brazilian composer, Louis Armstrong's "West End Blues," the Duke's [Ellington] "Black and Tan," Billie Holiday, of course. And then the country blues singers.

**Tell me more about the book.**

The hero of the book is Einstein.

**He's the hero of the book?**

Except he is also the villain. He's the villain for ironic reasons. Because an old guy said to me, "Einstein, the great heart, the great mind of the century, came to us from the future. We weren't ready for him." He was the one that suggested, to [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt, that the bomb be made. The atom bomb. Enrico Fermi does the unthinkable, splits the unsplitable, the atom.

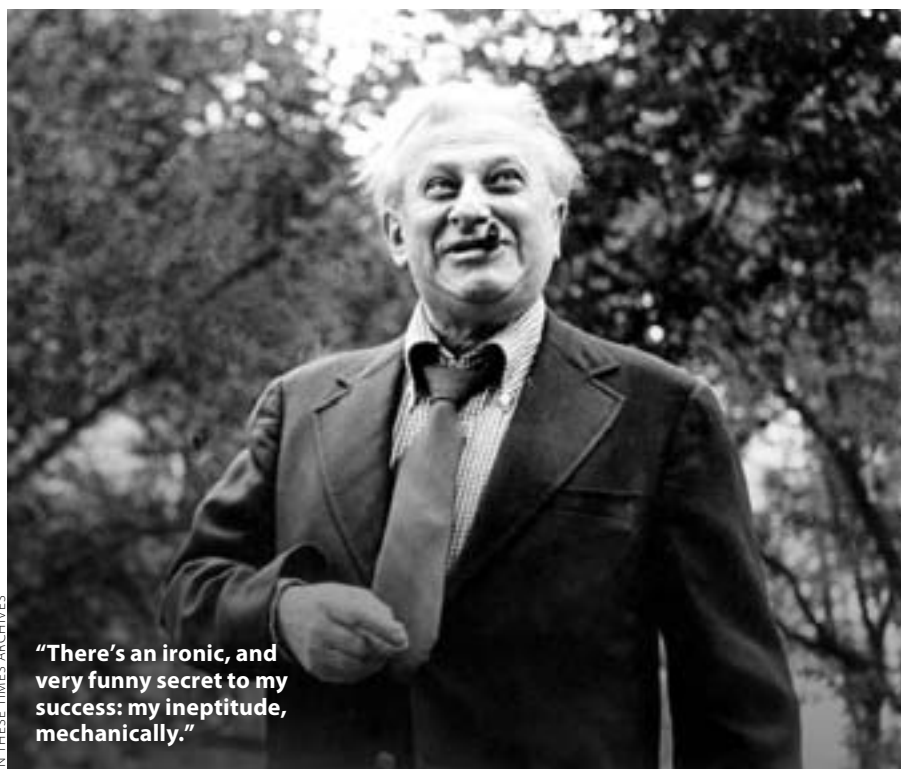
But Einstein never *dreamed* it would be used on human beings. And then he said, and this is how the book ends; he said, "I don't know what the weapons of World War III will be"—he wasn't thinking about Iraq—"I know the weapons of World War IV—sticks and stones." Sticks and stones.

What is he saying? He is saying we can blow up the world. They can blow us up, too. Because science is universal. Sticks and stones. He's saying our ancestors had fur hides on their backs and clubs in their hands. And our *descendants* will too. They'll come out of the cave trembling, with clubs, and out of the tribal memory will come things like Shakespeare and Mozart.

**What did they call you before they called you Studs?**

My name is Louis. And I became part of this labor theatre group. I was reading *Studs Lonigan*, by James T. Farrell. James T. Farrell talked the Chicago street talk. And so that played a big role in my life.





**"There's an ironic, and very funny secret to my success: my ineptitude, mechanically."**

### **Let me ask you something. You're an old radio guy: Don Imus?**

Ann Coulter, Bill O'Reilly. Don Imus is just one of them. He happens to be stupid. They all are! That's one of the things I have in the book—the lack of yesterday, of memory. The big thing that bothers me is the lack of history. Gore Vidal used the phrase, "United States of Amnesia." I call it the United States of Alzheimer's. We forget what happened yesterday.

Take this story. You know I walk to the bus. Bus number 146. They know me in the neighborhood. They know I'm a writer. They know me as the old guy who's garrulous. I talk to myself. [Laughs.]

So one day there's this one couple, they ignore me completely. So my ego is hurt. And I say, "The bus is late." And I say, to make conversation, "Labor Day's coming up." And the man just turns and looks at me—Brooks Brothers, under his arm, the latest *Wall Street Journal*. And she's a beauty. Neiman Marcus, Bloomingdale's. She's got *Vanity Fair* in her hand. And he turns, looks at me, and says, "We despise unions." And then he turns away.

And I said, "You what?" And the bus hasn't come yet. "Do you know that in 1886, '87, four guys got hanged? How many hours a day do you work?"

He says, "Eight," reflexively. I said, "How come you don't work 18 hours a day? Four guys got hanged for you. Did you know that?"

They think I'm crazy. They're scared. (Laughs.)

Now I've got him pinned against the mailbox. He can't get away. "So how many weeks do you work?" No bus yet.

So finally they get onto the bus, and she looks out the window, and he says, "Is that guy nuts?" And that was the last I saw of them. This is Uptown—the haves and have-nots. I'll bet they live in a condominium. Maybe the 15th floor.

### **What about Barack Obama? Do you think he's going to make it?**

He's remarkable. At this period, at this time, it's so dramatic and hopeful. Of course he's cautious about certain things. There's certain things he has to weigh. He's obviously very brilliant.

See, the word "liberal" has become like the word "communist" in the Cold War. In conversation people used to say, "not that I'm a communist." Now, it's "not that I'm a liberal."

John Kerry—one of the heroes. He was against the Vietnam War. He was on my show. And he's apologizing saying, "I'm not a liberal."

"Then what the hell are 'ya?" Finally I

say, "Well, the label means nothing," because I knew some Reds in the past who did some great stuff. The point is, it doesn't matter what name you're called. It's what you do that counts.

I call myself a radical conservative. Radical—look it up in the dictionary. It means, getting to the root of things. Now, I'm a conservative because I want to conserve the potability of our drinking water. I want to conserve the non-polluted air we can breathe. I want to conserve the First Amendment to the Constitution. And I want to conserve whatever little sanity we have left.

### **Is there someone you never had a chance to interview that you regret?**

George Bernard Shaw. Mark Twain. I almost got W.E.B. Du Bois.

### **What about young people? There are a lot of historical figures in this memoir.**

Well, that's the point. I'm a Rip Van Winkle guy. I don't know what the Internet is. What a website is. What a blog is. "Blog," to me, is the Flintstones. You know, Neanderthal. Blog. Or someone who's talkin' in tongues. Website reminds me of Robert the Bruce, the leader of the Scots. In one of the wars against the British, for independence, the troops are chasing him. He runs into a cave, and he sees a spider, making a web. And he maneuvers himself behind the spider and the web covers him, and the British troops can't find anybody there, except spider webs. So he survives, and makes it.

That's what the word website means. I don't know anything about these new words.

### **These new words are changing the world.**

That's the interesting thing. A new way of getting at things. That's how Howard Dean became known. And that's a good, hopeful sign.

### **What do you want your tombstone to say Studs?**

On my tombstone? Because of my curiosity, my tombstone is very simple: "Curiosity could not kill this cat." That's it. And I think we've come to the end of the course. For me, I think so.

### **No more books?**

No. You sound like my publisher. That's it! ■



BY CHRISTOPHER HAYES

## Who's Afraid of Democracy?

Behavioral economists at UC San Diego recently conducted a study in which tokens were distributed among experimental subjects, with a few getting a concentrated chunk of the wealth and a majority getting little. They offered the “poor”

subjects the opportunity to pay a price to take money away from the rich. The catch was that rather than being redistributed, the money would simply disappear. Economic orthodoxy predicts that few would snap at the chance, since they'd be paying for something that would confer no direct benefit. But they did. In spades.

Though only one data point, it suggests that people have a profound sense of economic fairness, that we are all, more or less, intuitive socialists. As far back as Edmund Burke, conservatives have suspected as much and feared democracy for that very reason. Read James Madison in the Federalist Papers and it's clear that many of the Constitution's undemocratic elements were designed to prevent the expropriation of wealth from an outnumbered elite.

This central tension between laissez faire capital-

ism and the redistributive whims of a democratic electorate isn't discussed much. But it can poke through the surface during moments of clarity, such as the last election, when minimum wage increases passed in every state—red and blue—where they were on the ballot.

For Bryan Caplan, an economist at George Mason University and author of *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies*, the minimum wage is an iconic example of the economically backwards policies favored by the foolish masses. “In theory,” he writes, “democracy is a bulwark against socially harmful policies, but in practice it gives them safe harbor.” Examining this “paradox” takes up the rest of the book, but his explanation is pretty simple: Voters are crazy.

*The Myth of the Rational Voter* is best understood

in the context of a long-standing academic debate over whether democracy works. It's a question that has two related, but distinct, sub-components: Do democracies produce optimal policies for its citizens? And do democracies produce policies that accurately reflect the will of the majority?

The most sanguine observers say "yes" on both counts. But given that surveys consistently show that voters are distressingly ignorant about both the rudiments of policy (whether we spend more on foreign aid or social security) and politics (how many senators each state has), it's a difficult case to make. Another strain of thought is the so-called Public Choice school, which answers "no" to both questions. Public Choice theorists tend, like Caplan, to be free market enthusiasts and argue that democracies inevitably lead to bloated bureaucracies, trade protectionism and inefficient subsidies. These sub-optimal economic policies occur not because of their widespread popularity, but rather because the state's agenda is so easily manipulated by special interests looking to make easy money by regulating their competitors or getting their hands on taxpayer dollars.

Caplan disagrees: Democracy fails to produce good policies precisely *because* it reflects the will of the majority. Or, as H.L. Mencken once put it: "Democracy is the theory that the people know what they want and deserve to get it good and hard."

What the people want, according to Caplan, is economic bollocks. To establish this point, he devotes a chapter to the Survey of Americans and Economists on the Economy (SAEE). Conducted in 1996, the survey asked economists and members of the general public questions about the economy, and found a divergence of opinion on almost every principle of policy: whether taxes, immigration and foreign aid are major or minor contributors to the nation's economic health, whether "business profits are too high," and whether "downsizing" is hurting the economy.

Caplan attributes this divergence to four basic biases of the unwashed masses—anti-market bias (a skepticism that the price mechanism works), anti-foreign bias, make-work bias (a desire to create jobs even if it's inefficient) and pessimistic bias, the tendency to believe the economy's getting worse instead of better. Imagine the worldview of Lou Dobbs,

and that's roughly the belief system Caplan thinks is typical. Because these biases make people feel good about themselves, people hold to them even in the face of countervailing evidence. Or, more precisely, they hold to them *irrationally*.

But this argument puts Caplan in a precarious position. The consensus economic

## **Given the choice between democracy without free markets or free markets without democracy, many conservatives would cheerfully opt for the latter.**

model that he subscribes to—and that forms the worldview of the economists that he cites as definitive—is grounded on the assumption that people are rational. Pull out that Jenga block and the edifice of Caplan's economic worldview tumbles down with it: If people aren't rational, there's no reason to assume that they'll respond predictably to incentives or market signals.

So Caplan requires extra dexterity to withdraw the "rational voter" from the architecture of his theoretical framework. He must somehow maintain that the same person can be rational as a consumer, worker or business owner, but irrational as a citizen and a voter. In other words, voters must be somehow possessed of what Caplan calls "rational irrationality."

The idea is this: People are rational when they pay for the consequences of their decisions. But in elections, the odds of your vote determining a given election are so slim that the price of voting your irrational whims is nil. This gives people the freedom to indulge delusional notions about the economy. And that results in a populace who are capitalists in the market place and socialists in the voting booth. Needless to say, Caplan thinks we're at our best in the former case and quotes legendary economist Joseph Schumpeter to describe the latter: "[T]he typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field. He argues and analyzes in a way which he would readily recognize as infantile within the sphere of his real interests. He becomes a primitive again."

"If people are rational as consumers and irrational as voters," Caplan writes, "it is a good idea to rely more on markets and less on politics."

The first and most obvious problem

with Caplan's argument is that it quickly leads to some very dark places. He notes, enthusiastically, that education makes people think more like economists and that, luckily, the highly educated vote at higher rates than the less educated. But why leave it to chance? You could instead give more votes to businessmen and uni-

versity graduates, as Caplan comes close to proposing, or simply require people to "pass a test of economic literacy to vote."

Which brings us to the second problem: what constitutes economic consensus. Caplan spends considerable time attempting to persuade the reader that if experts and the general public disagree, the experts are right and the public wrong. That may often be the case, but it's not a static proposition: What experts believe evolves over time, and the same is true of the public. In 1996, the public thought taxes were too high, but recent polling suggests that's no longer the case. The kinds of social democratic market interventions that Caplan holds in such low regard were prominent features of the post-war economies of the United States, Canada and Western Europe, which were some of the most productive and equitable in human history. Not only were the policies relatively effective, they were also largely popular with both the public and economists. Caplan's book wouldn't have made much sense 40 years ago, which prompts the question: Will it make much sense in the future? Caplan thinks he's describing the fundamentals about human nature, but he might just be elaborating on the contingencies of an era.

What's more, sometimes the public is right and the experts are wrong. Economic experts used to believe in price controls. Foreign policy experts thought we should go to war with Iraq. The record of expertise in matters of public policy is an uneven one, to say the least.

Finally, Caplan over-interprets the degree of economic consensus. He stresses that, appearances to the contrary, economists agree on a broad range of principles, and the data from SAEE bear this out. But governments don't legislate prin-



ciples; they legislate policies, and when it comes to policies the disagreement is tremendous. Caplan thinks the minimum wage borders on quackery, but last year more than 500 economists, including a half-dozen Nobel laureates, signed a petition in favor of raising it.

Indeed, in this respect, the book eats its own tail. Caplan wants to grant a presumptive authority to the consensus view of economists, but the consensus view of economists is that voters are rational, which is, of course, precisely the position he wants to convince us is wrong.

It's tempting to dismiss Caplan's thesis out of hand, because it's so self-consciously "provocative" and because he's translating an old discredited anti-democratic argument into the jargon of econocentric elite-speak. But if you support democracy, you must confront the fact that voters can often be stunningly under-informed and that majoritarianism run amok can lead to persecution, hatred and injustice. Reading Caplan's book, then, is both bracing and necessary because it forces the reader to stare into the abyss—an abyss the author seems only too happy to jump into.

Caplan's willingness to embrace the darkness, however, is what makes this book so important: It articulates in lurid detail the obscene id of Chicago-school, Grover-Norquist-style, free market fundamentalism (a term Caplan spends a chapter rebutting). Given a choice between democracy without free markets or free markets without democracy, many conservatives would gladly choose the latter. Hence Milton Friedman advising Augusto Pinochet in Chile and the Bush administration's support of a coup in Venezuela.

And the book's manifest elitism is not fringe. It is blurbed by economist Alan Blinder, who advised President Clinton, and N. Gregory Mankiw, who headed the Council of Economic Advisors under George W. Bush. Over the last 30 years, conservatives have made political hay by railing against liberal "elitists" who want to substitute the judgment of faceless bureaucrats, activist judges and pointy-headed intellectuals for that of the common man. Yet if you got some prominent conservatives off the record—after plying them with a few drinks—I bet more than a few would agree with Caplan: Voters are fools.

Good thing our campaign donors are the ones who really run things. ■



## BOOKS

# Developmentalism in the Big Apple

By Steven Wishnia

**T**HIRTY YEARS AGO, you could easily find a one-bedroom apartment in a middle-class neighborhood in New York City for \$150 a month. Today, it would cost more than \$1,500—more than what Yankees slugger Reggie Jackson, then baseball's highest-paid player, paid in 1977. His Fifth Avenue apartment with a balcony overlooking Central Park cost \$1,466 a month. And the minimum wage hasn't gone up to \$27.82 an hour.

How we got to this point is the subject of Kim Moody's *From Welfare State to Real Estate: Regime Change in New York City, 1974 to the Present* (The New Press). Moody analyzes how New York's business elite exploited the '70s fiscal crisis to destroy the city's "social-democratic polity" and impose the neoliberal agenda that has dictated "restraint on social spending, privatization, deregulation, and most importantly, the reassertion of class power by the nation's capitalist class."

The result is a city where inequality has grown to extremes far beyond those in the rest of the country, where a small but growing cabal of the spectacularly rich uses government as a vending machine and lords it over a hollowed-out middle class and millions of low-paid, increasingly immigrant service workers. Moody, a cofounder of *Labor Notes*, lays this out lucidly and in detail. For those who love

New York, reading it is both enlightening and infuriating, like a true-crime book where you know the victim.

The conventional wisdom is that the 1975 fiscal crisis was caused by profligate liberal policies: the expansion of social services in the '60s and the costs of supporting the largest public-service infrastructure of any U.S. city, with 22 public hospitals, a free university system and the biggest subway system in the world. Moody points out that spending growth in those areas had slowed dramatically since the '60s, while the cost of interest on the city's debt was mushrooming. He posits that eliminating tax abatements for corporate construction could have done a lot to avert the crisis. That explanation feels a bit thin—the deeper structural cause was the city's massive deindustrialization. Moody notes that New York lost an astounding 600,000 industrial jobs between 1968 and 1977. That eliminated the working-class prosperity that was the economic and political base for supporting such a public infrastructure. It also eliminated the traditional source of legitimate income in the city's poorer neighborhoods.

Scared by what would happen if the city went bankrupt, local labor unions largely collaborated with the elite agenda of layoffs and service cuts. The transformation into an economy dominated by finance restored the city's overall wealth, but the distribution of it became grossly unequal. And with labor having tacitly assented to this state of affairs, city politics for the next 25 years would be dominated by racial appeals. White voters elected mayors Ed Koch and Rudy Giuliani, who campaigned and governed on thinly cod-



ed law-and-order slogans. David Dinkins, the city's one-term (1990-93) black mayor, symbolically evoked diversity more than he challenged the elite agenda. Moody notes that the teachers union refused to endorse him for re-election; the reason was that Dinkins had promised them a token pay raise and reneged on it after the city's establishment objected.

Current Mayor Michael Bloomberg is often called a liberal—in these devalued times when merely not being psychotic about other people's sex lives is enough to qualify—but he's actually a devout plutocrat. He's not as pugnacious as Giuliani (though he has similar contempt for civil liberties), but his role requires different character traits. Giuliani's task was to put the "ungovernable" racial elements in their place; Bloomberg's is to enable the rich to make cauldrons of money. Moody terms the mayor's philosophy "developmentalism": packing the skyline with luxury high-rises and handing out more than \$3 billion a year in tax breaks to corporations and upscale housing, while rapidly rising numbers of working-class New Yorkers pay

more than half their income in rent. During this real-estate boom, Moody notes, not only have levies on working people—income and sales taxes—surpassed property taxes as a source of city revenue, but the property-tax system is so skewed that the owner of a two-family house in a lower-middle-class black neighborhood near Kennedy Airport pays almost three times the percentage of market value charged on a 12-room Park Avenue co-op.

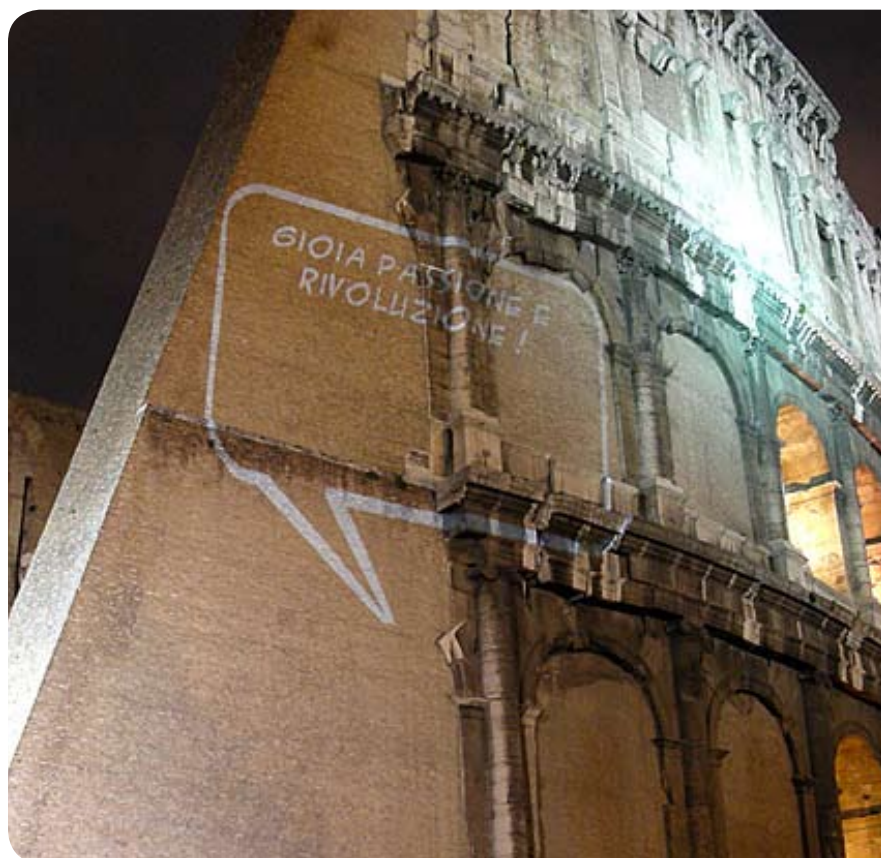
Bloomberg has made some grand-sounding promises about building affordable housing, but Moody dissects the formulas used to determine what's deemed "affordable." Based on the median income for the metropolitan area, apartments that go for as much as \$1,800 a month are classified as "middle income," such as those in the planned Atlantic Yards sports arena/housing complex in Brooklyn. And both the mayor and Gov. Eliot Spitzer, a Democrat, oppose restoring the city's home rule over its rent-control laws. Moody doesn't go into much history on this, but the 1971 state law that banned the city from enacting any rent restrictions stronger than the

state's was a harbinger of the neoliberal agenda. It put power over the rent laws in the hands of upstate and suburban Republicans whose strongest connection to the city is the money they take from its landlords. When they gutted the rent-stabilization laws in 1997, and when former Gov. George Pataki virtually eliminated enforcement against illegally high rents, the city government was powerless to stop it.

Against all this, Moody posits the possibility that some new activist coalition, growing out of the city's one million rank-and-file union members, community-labor organizations such as Brooklyn's Make the Road By Walking, and tenant and anti-gentrification groups, will emerge to battle neoliberalism. It's a thin hope so far, but an essential one.

One promising recent trend has been the emergence of organizing against "environmental racism," the practice of placing incinerators in working-class and poor Latino and black neighborhoods that were already polluted. As one city official told me in the early '90s when I was covering the campaign against a 55-story

## [ art space ]



### Mobile Graffiti

Cell phones separate users from the outside world. With that in mind, artist Paul Notzold created TXTual Healing. To re-connect cell phone users with the world around them, he has developed a way for citizens to force their thoughts on any passer-by via text messaging.

Using a computer to receive the messages, Notzold projects the text messages via a portable projector onto the sides of buildings, frequently encasing the message in a speech bubble that appears to emanate from a window.

Since all he needs is his computer, a projector and a power source, Notzold has demonstrated TXTual Healing around the world, from Queens to Beijing. Check out his work at [www.txtualhealing.com](http://www.txtualhealing.com).

—Anna Grace Schneider

incinerator proposed for the Brooklyn Navy Yard: "Where should we put it? On Fifth Avenue?"

Julie Sze's *Noxious New York: The Racial Politics of Urban Health and Environmental Justice* (MIT Press) analyzes how organizers in four such targeted neighborhoods synthesized environmental concerns with class and race issues. They also developed novel tactics, such as the "Earth Crew," teenagers who worked with the Columbia School of Public Health to measure soot and particulate pollution at four intersections near a West Harlem bus depot; activists used the data to persuade the city to convert the buses there to hybrid vehicles.

Two principles emerged from the movement. One was a focus on the cumulative effects of neighborhood pollution. In the South Bronx, where 40 percent of the children in some schools had asthma, activists protested that a proposed medical-waste incinerator would only make this worse. And when Giuliani closed the legendarily pungent Fresh Kills landfill in Staten Island in 1996, planning to privatize garbage disposal and truck the city's waste to other states, a key criticism was that the plan would pour diesel exhaust into the air of Williamsburg and the South Bronx, which held most of the city's waste-transfer stations. The other was the "precautionary" principle, that potential polluters be required to prove that their operations will be safe, instead of the community having to prove direct harm.

Sze weaves in intriguing bits of history throughout the book, such as noting that in the early 20th century, 80 percent of U.S. cities required recycling organic waste and coal ashes. But her writing often belabors the obvious. Describing an environmentalist coalition's flyer that depicted Gov. Pataki and a black kid with an asthma inhaler, Sze writes, "This visual contrast of the state's most powerful politician with a child of color with asthma is a literal representation of [the group's] essential politics and belief systems." Since the records of environmental-justice campaigns have been mixed, the book would also have benefited from more voices from organizers and the communities involved, assessing which strategies worked, which didn't and what more is needed.

We desperately need that kind of organizing savvy, particularly in the face of, as these two books clearly demonstrate, neoliberalism's toxic blend of economic oppression and environmental ravages. ■



Steve Bretland's environmentally responsible t-shirts will not be coming to a big-box store near you.

## FASHION

# Chasing the Green Pound in London

By Jessica Clark

**I**T DOESN'T LOOK like much: a beige cotton tote with a rope handle, reminiscent of '70s bookbags. Chocolate piping sets off the brown slogan appliquéd on the front in an offbeat curlicue font: "I am not a plastic bag."

And yet the homely thing set a veritable fashion bonfire on the streets of London in late April. Why?

Designer Anya Hindmarch usually makes high-end purses, the most personalized of which cost £6,500 (yes, that's \$13,000). But in partnership with the British grocery giant Sainsbury's and the We Are What We Do campaign, she created the £5 bag, to encourage consumers to forgo plastic bags at the checkout counter. The bags soon sold out at her boutique, and then spawned queues that started at 2 a.m. when Sainsbury's placed them on sale in batches of 30 at selected stores. They were gone within the first hour, and were reportedly appearing on eBay for upwards of £200. Similar releases are planned in the United States (June, navy blue) and Japan (July, bottle green).

The bag's blaze was fed by celebrity cred: Keira Knightly was spotted with one, and *Vanity Fair* chose them as their Oscar night "goodie bag." But she who lives by the tabloid must die by it too. Within less than a week, the *Evening Standard* had re-

vealed that the must-have accessory was not only made of standard-issue cotton, but sewn in China. "Exposed! I am not an ethical bag," read their banner headline. Another eco-icon down the chute.

This morality tale of the not-a-plastic-bag encapsulates London's twinned obsession with throwaway fashion and ecological responsibility. It's a boom town right now, with the pound at a high of \$2 and property values hitting late-'90s levels. Cranes split the skyline, and consumers flock from gimmick to gimmick, giddy with purchasing power ... and racked with guilt. Stores and media outlets cater to the mania, appealing to buyers' urge to binge and their morning-after purges. Each impulse has its own celebrity spokespeople: Kate Moss recently launched a line with "fast fashion" knockoff chain TopShop, while liberal icons like Sting endorse socially conscious clothing lines.

The BBC has salted the wound, with doleful explorations of the sins of the "moregeoisie." This new breed wants bigger cars, more extreme vacations, and yet environmentally clean consciences. They indulge in much fretting about their "carbon footprints."

Tying it all together, of course, are those plastic bags—and China. On March 31, an article in the *Guardian Weekend* reported that most of Britain's shopping bags—17 billion per year—are made in China, and then shipped 10,000 miles back to China to be recycled in low-paying plants that foul the rivers and smell up the villages. Suddenly Hindmarch starts to look a little better ... but not good enough.



So, caught in a series of conundrums—fair trade vs. fair prices, eco-cotton vs. eco-sloganeering, wardrobe cues from aging rockers vs. vapid catwalk twits—what's a fashion-conscious shopper to do? Go local.

Each Friday in London's too-trendy East End, the historic Spitalfield's Market plays host to fashion students and artists hawking their wares. The market itself has suffered from London's property boom; the space for stalls was reduced a few years ago as developers erected stores and office blocks.

Remixing and remaking are fashion buzzwords among this clutch of younger artisans. These practices reflect both ecological awareness and a generational impulse informed by digital cut-and-paste aesthetics. One Spitalfields vendor, Charlotte Law, has been growing her own "mini-brand" ([www.moreofthatilk.com](http://www.moreofthatilk.com)), for the past few years. Law handmakes the label's pins and purses out of brightly-colored fabric and appliquéd leather shapes which seem inspired in equal measure by the aesthetics of goth and Japanese kawaii.

"When I get the chance, I do like to use recycled fabrics," Law says. The bags she has on display feature scraps of used clothes and curtains. I ask her what she thinks of the "not a plastic bag" campaign. "I do like it," she answers, "and it's nice to use those slogans. But it is made in China."

What about the alternative—couture fashion made by high-end designers? "I find £2,000 for a handbag a bit grotesque," she says. Besides, she notes, with all of the fashion knockoffs, it's hard for anything to stay in style for too long.

Another pair of vendors, Steve Bretland and Jen Sandiford of Loglike ([www.loglike.co.uk](http://www.loglike.co.uk)), make sure their products are environmentally responsible. They offer T-shirts made of certified organic cotton, dyed with low-impact dyes and hand screen-printed using a water-based system to minimize toxic runoff. They also sell a line of remade products, including candleholders fashioned from second-hand saucers and patterns for stuffed toys printed on vintage fabrics.

"It's taken us a long time to get to this point of being able to sell things—partly because you have to earn a living," says Bretland, a teacher. The pair visited trade shows and did lots of research. On the table is a bound sheaf of plastic-sheathed papers that explain the ecological processes they've chosen. "We try to be as

transparent as possible," he says.

Bretland rolls his eyes when asked about the Hindmarch promotion. "I imagine that some of those won't even be used," he says. "They'll become collectibles. Kind of ironic, that."

And yet, flawed as it is, the "I am not a plastic bag" campaign has brought environmental issues to the attention of thousands of consumers in a way that these small, idealistic producers can't hope to, at least with their current capacity. Sandiford explains that they produce the shirts in batches of 20, but hope to move to larger runs if they sell, working with an ecologically certified silk screen printer.

Perhaps this new generation of designers can build upon the current craze, spurring widespread demand for products that not only proclaim their eco-identity, but then match it with ethical labor and materials.

In the meantime, a new market is growing—for ripoffs of the Hindmarch bag. Law says that Marissa Vanderzee ([www.marissav.com](http://www.marissav.com)), a designer who sells her wares at the Sunday UpMarket around the corner from Spitalfields, has started producing a bag that reads "I'm not a smug twat." Orders are booming. ■

## BOOKS

# These Guns for Hire

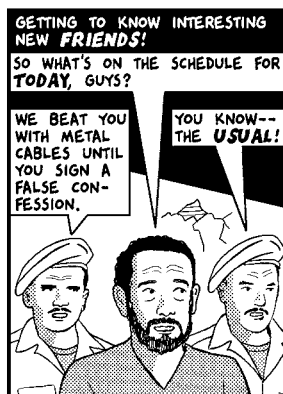
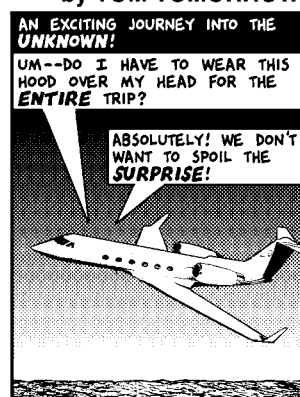
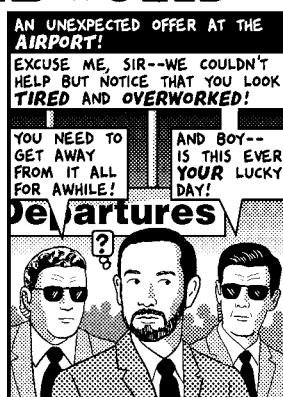
By Chris Barsanti

**A**S REPORTED IN Jeremy Scahill's *Blackwater* (Nation Books), one of the largest providers of private security assets to the U.S. military is more than a business: It's a well-armed and well-funded cog in the military-industrial complex led by a self-styled Christian warrior with deep ties to the right's thecon fringe. In short, the sort of thing to keep any right-minded, small-d democrat awake at night. Although the book itself is essentially a magazine feature bloated up to book length without the additional research needed to justify the heft, the facts at its core are the eye-widening stuff of lurid conspiracy novels.

The Christian warrior described above is Erik Prince, son of auto parts multi-millionaire Edgar Prince, who, until his death in 1995, ran bucolic Holland, Mich., as a company town and provided seed money for, among other causes, James Dobson's Focus on the Family. Although Erik, a stridently orthodox Catholic convert and former SEAL, wouldn't take over the family

## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



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business, he followed in Edgar's footsteps in other ways. In 1997, Erik founded Blackwater USA, a private security firm based on several thousand acres of North Carolina swamp. A number of Blackwater executives are deeply conservative Christians, including corruption-smearred former Pentagon Inspector General Joseph Schmitz, who is also a member of the Sovereign Order of Malta, which Scahill describes as "a Christian militia formed in the eleventh century [to defend] 'territories that the Crusaders had conquered from the Moslems.'" Blackwater makes hundreds of millions of dollars in no-bid contracts from the Pentagon and fields what might be the world's largest private military force, with 2,300 armed men working around the globe, and a database with 21,000 more. As many critics have ominously noted, the company already has enough man- and firepower to take over a small Third World country.

Given all that, it's not hard to buy Scahill's charge that Prince, "who has been in the thick of this right-wing effort to unite conservative Catholics, evangelicals, and neoconservatives in a common theocratic holy war," has essentially created a modern-day Praetorian Guard that Prince envisions as the tip of the Christian right's spear. This also seems to be exactly how the administration wants it.

The unholy admixture of extreme capitalism and right-wing political ideology has rarely been more perfectly realized than in the convenient marriage of the Bush era's global war doctrine and the rise of freelance gunsels like Blackwater. Since the '90s, Rumsfeld and Cheney had both been pushing the outsourcing agenda with evangelical fervor. (Rumsfeld once called for the military to behave more like "venture capitalists.") As they saw it, the war on terror/Iraq/whoever would be better fought by flexible units of contractors. After the Pentagon spent some \$300 billion on contractors between 1994 and 2002, it was hardly surprising that the Defense Department's 2006 Quadrennial Review redefined "Total Force" to include contractors, essentially deputizing mercenaries into the U.S. military. One out of 60 U.S. military personnel serving in the Gulf War theater of operations were contractors; in the Iraq War by late 2006 that ratio was by some counts almost one to one.

Firms like Blackwater are so central to the administration's war efforts that Paul Bremer's last act before leaving Baghdad was issuing Order 17, "immunizing all con-

## excerpt



### "The Word" From Chicago

*Timothy Sewell, 17, Dwantez Ivy, 16, Joseph Rangel, 16, Juan Beard, 17, and Jurnell Terry, 16—five students at Manley Career Academy, a Chicago public school—wrote this poem about the "n word" as part of their work with the Umoja Student Development Corporation. They performed it in April at the Chicago History Museum. It reads in part:*

King got called this  
Parks got called this  
X got called this  
WE ALL GOT CALLED THIS!  
N is for the negativity  
I faced the indignity ...  
Now we can't get rid of the  
Inflation of a five-letter degradation stripping us of  
our rights of royalty, heritage and nation  
So as of this moment  
THE WORD NO LONGER EXISTS! ...  
Being called ignorant and dumb from one word of hate  
Going through trials and tribulations that one  
word could make  
This one word of hate  
Confuses, abuses, and uses the life of a black man  
Turn our life into a game of Pac Man, we acting  
Like we don't know the harm that this word is packing ...  
So today we stop the word  
To protect our people ...  
We seem to put ourselves back into a mess  
Have the nerve to say it is the man  
They set us up so we can  
PULL OURSELVES DOWN! ...  
So as of this moment  
THE WORD NO LONGER EXISTS!  
TODAY  
WE STOP  
THE WORD.

tractors in Iraq from prosecution." So if any of the thousands of contractors currently employed in Iraq or Afghanistan were to commit a Haditha-like rampage (Blackwater employs many ex-Chilean commandos from the Pinochet era), it wouldn't be clear what, if any, justice they could possibly face. To make matters more muddled, it's not even clear *who* all these contractors are even working for, even though almost 650 contractors had been killed in Iraq by September 2006. After the infamous incident on March 31, 2004—when four Blackwater employees were ambushed in Fallujah, their bodies mutilated and set on fire—nobody could ever conclusively say *what* the men were even doing there, *who* they were working for and under whose command. The truth was buried in a mire of bureaucratic and subcontracting smoke-

screens. Representing Blackwater against a lawsuit from the dead men's families (one of whom memorably referred to the company as a "whore of war") was none other than Kenneth Starr.

Indeed, Scahill has a fantastic subject here in Blackwater. But having such a wealth of easy targets to lob stones at seems to keep him from digging deeper or casting a wider net in the manner of a Steve Coll or Jon Lee Anderson. The thinness of Scahill's approach is most apparent in his habit of excessively repeating key facts, sometimes replicating entire sentences verbatim. That said, *Blackwater* raises a host of deeply disturbing questions about where America's military is being led by this new breed of free-market mercenaries—merchants of death who see war as nothing more than a growth market. ■

BY TERRY J. ALLEN

# America's Child Soldier Problem



**C**ONGRATULATIONS: YOU HAVE lived long enough to cringe at the bad decisions you were seduced, dared, bullied, inspired or stoned enough to make as a teenager.

Thousands of America's children, however, are not so lucky. Almost 600,000 of America's 1 million active and reserve soldiers enlisted as teens. The military lures these physiologically immature kids with a PR machine that would make Joe Camel proud.

While the age of legal and cultural adulthood can vary, science is now able to determine the physiological markers of maturity. A recent study headed by Jay Giedd of the National Institutes of Health using MRI scans shows that the brain of an 18-year-old is not fully developed, with the limbic cortex-brain structures, the cerebellum and prefrontal cortex still undergoing substantial changes.

As of March 31, the U.S. military included 81,000 teenagers. Its 7,350 17-year-olds needed parental consent to enlist, and only this April were all barred from battle zones.

But the military aims even lower, marketing itself to children as young as 13 with multimedia videos, school visits and cold calls to teens' homes and cell phones. In Junior ROTC, kids get uniforms, win medals, fire real guns and play soldier, while adults trained in psychological manipulation steer them toward the army. The Army's JROTC website lists such motivating activities as "eating at concession stands."

A mature prefrontal cortex, "the area of sober second thought," is vital not only to deciding whether to enlist, but also to choices made under the stress of deployment and the terrors of combat. But the prefrontal cortex, "important for

controlling impulses, is among the last brain regions to mature," according to Giedd, and doesn't reach "adult dimensions until the early 20s."

Teenagers' brains simply lack the impulse control that can prevent a lifetime of regret, psychological and physical disability, and preventable deaths—their own, their fellow soldiers' and those of civilians.

The child soldier problem is global and so is America's role in it. More than 300,000 children around the world, some as young as seven, serve as soldiers, or, in the case of girls, as military sex slaves. The State Department reports that 10 countries are violating international treaties against child soldiers. Washington provides military assistance to nine of these outlaw nations: Afghanistan, Burundi, Chad, Colombia, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Uganda.

The reason the United States and other militaries target children is their need for cannon fodder, coupled with the vulnerability of youth. In 2002, almost half of Marine recruits were 17 or 18. A Pentagon survey found that "for both males and females, propensity [to enlist] is highest among 16- and 17-year-olds." That "propensity" quickly declines with age.

A 2004 Pentagon database listed the number of 16- and 17-year-olds who applied for active service enlistment at 69,000 and 18-year-olds at 73,000. By 19, the count had dropped to 49,000 and by age 24 had plummeted to 9,700.

The Department of Defense (DoD) spends more than \$4 billion a year on recruiting, with \$1.5 billion for advertising and maintaining the recruiting stations staffed by more than 22,000 recruiters. Much of that money goes to convincing children to become soldiers.

A recruiters' handbook discusses creepy seduction techniques with all the subtlety of predatory stalking. Adult recruiters skilled in "projecting credibility"

lurk in snack joints, set up laptops playing action-packed videos, proffer rides and promise friendship and fatherly advice. With blacks particularly skeptical of the war effort, the military is aggressively targeting Hispanics with multimillion dollar marketing campaigns that include chatting up mothers and attending church. Recruiters get non-English speaking parents to sign enlistment papers for 17-year-olds by letting them believe that service is mandatory, or that they were approving blood tests, according to the *New York Times*.

Recruiters also try to win over high school guidance counselors with offers of "extended tours, VIP trips ('A day in the life of a sailor') or workshops."

A DoD training manual instructs recruiters to appropriate the techniques that pharmaceutical salespeople use to convince doctors to prescribe the most profitable drugs: "Pharmaceutical representatives court doctors and provide incentives to them in exchange for listening to a sales pitch and considering their products." DoD advises following the pharma model by offering "personalized incentives in exchange for some of their time (bring food when asking favors)."

The manual suggests bribing teachers: "Provide lunch for teachers in exchange for information." It quotes an anonymous teacher: "Giving teachers pencils and calendars lets us know that you understand our needs and support us. We, in turn, are more likely to support your efforts in the future."

"Chiefs of warfare reach out to children precisely because they are innocent, malleable, impressionable," says Olara Otunnu, the U.N. Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

The science is clear: Turning children below the age of brain maturity into soldiers, whether in the United States or Sudan, exploits that vulnerability. ■

**CONTACT** Terry J. Allen at [tallen@igc.org](mailto:tallen@igc.org)

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# Dreams of Others

Continued from back page

est and supportive, one was not very bright; if one was bright and supportive, one was not honest; if one was honest and bright, one was not supportive. The problem with Dreyman is that he does combine all three features.

To ask some obvious questions: If he was such an honest and powerful writer, how come he did not get into trouble with the regime much earlier? Why wasn't he considered at least a little bit problematic by the regime, with his excesses tolerated because of his international fame, as was the case with famous GDR authors like Bertolt Brecht, Heiner Müller and Christa Wolf? The film takes place in 1984—so where was he in 1976 when the GDR regime did not allow Wolf Biermann to return from a West German tour, leading nearly all great East German writers to sign a petition protesting this measure.

Likewise, during a reception at the film's beginning, a dissident directly and aggressively confronts the culture minister, without consequences. If such a thing was possible, as is assumed in the film, was the regime really so terrible? Finally, there is a weird twist to the story that blatantly contradicts historical fact. In all known cases of a married couple where a spouse betrayed a partner, it was always a man who became an informant—in *Lives*, it is the woman, Christa-Maria, who breaks down and betrays her husband.

Isn't the reason for this weird distortion the film's secret homosexual undercurrent? The film's hero, Gerd Wiesler, a Stasi agent whose duty is to plant the microphones and listen to everything the couple does, becomes attracted to Dreyman. It is this affection that gradually leads him to help Dreyman. After *die Wende*—the "turning point" when the Wall came down—Dreyman discovers what went on by gaining access to his files. He returns Wiesler's love interest, secretly following Wiesler who now works as a modest postman. The situation is thus effectively reversed: The observed victim is now the observer. In the film's last scene, Wiesler goes to a bookstore (the legendary Karl-Marx-Buchhandlung on the Stalin Alee, of course), buys the writer's new novel, *The Sonata for an Honest Man*, and discovers it is dedicated to him (designated by his secret Stasi code). Thus, to indulge

in a somewhat cruel irony, the finale of *Lives* recalls the famous ending of *Casa-blanca*: With the "beginning of a beautiful friendship" between Dreyman and Wiesler, now that the intruding obstacle of a woman is conveniently out of the way—a true Christ-like gesture of sacrifice on her part. (No wonder her name is Christa-Maria!)

terrorism, hopeless life struggle and racism, it is clear that the need for such a utopian escape is real.

To put it quite brutally, while *Ostalgie* is widely practiced in today's Germany without causing ethical problems, one (for the time being, at least) cannot imagine publicly practicing a Nazi nostalgia: "Good Bye Hitler" instead of

**Of the three features—personal honesty, sincere support of the regime and intelligence—it was possible to combine only two while living under a Communist regime, never all three.**

In contrast to this idyll, the very superficial appearance of light-hearted nostalgic comedy in *Good Bye Lenin!* is a screen that covers a much harsher underlying reality (signalled at the film's opening by the brutal intrusion of the Stasi into the family home after the husband escapes to the West). The lesson is thus much more desperate than the one of *Lives*: No heroic resistance to the GDR regime could be sustained. The only way to survive was to escape into madness, to disconnect from reality.

*Good Bye Lenin!* tells the story of a son whose mother, an honest GDR believer, has a heart attack on the night of the demonstrations that ultimately led to the regime's demise in 1991. She survives, but the doctor warns the son that any traumatic experience could cause her death. With the help of a friend, the son thus stages for his mother, who is contained to her apartment, the smooth continuation of the GDR: Every evening, they air the video-recorded fake GDR news. Toward the film's end, the hero says that the game got out of hand—the fiction staged for the dying mother became an alternate GDR, reinvented as it should have been.

Therein resides the key political question, beyond the rather boring topic of *Ostalgie* (which is not a real longing for the GDR, but the enactment of the real parting from it, the acquiring of a distance, de-traumatization): Was this dream of an "alternate GDR" inherent to the GDR itself? When, in the final fictional TV report, the new GDR leader (the first GDR astronaut) decides to open the borders, allowing the West German citizens to escape consumer

"Good Bye Lenin." Doesn't this bear witness to the fact that we are still aware of the emancipatory potential in Communism, which, distorted and thwarted as it was, was thoroughly missing in Fascism? The quasi-metaphysical epiphany toward the film's end (when the mother, on her first walk outside the apartment, finds herself face-to-face with a Lenin-statue carried by the helicopter, whose outstretched hand seems to address her directly) is thus to be taken more seriously than it may appear.

This, of course, in no way implies that *Good Bye Lenin!* is without faults. The weak point of the film is that (like Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful*) it sustains the ethics of protecting one's illusions: It manipulates the threat of a new heart attack as the means to blackmail us into accepting the need to protect one's fantasy as the highest ethical duty. Isn't the film then unexpectedly endorsing Leo Strauss' thesis on the need for a "noble lie"? So is it really that the emancipatory potential of Communism is only a "noble lie" to be staged and sustained for the naive believers, a lie which effectively only masks the ruthless violence of the Communist rule? Here mother is the "subject supposed to believe": through her, others sustain their belief. (The irony is that it is usually the mother who is supposed to be the caretaker, protecting children from cruel reality.)

The lesson of all this? We are still waiting for a film that would provide a complete description of the GDR terror, a film that would do for the Stasi what Varlam Shalamov, in his unsurpassed *Kolyma Tales*, did for the Gulag. ■



# THE DREAMS OF OTHERS

BY SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

**F**LORIAN HENCKEL VON DONNERSMARCK'S *The Lives of Others*—this year's Oscar-winning film on life under the Stasi, the East German secret police—has often been favorably compared with Ulrich Becker's 2003 comedy *Good Bye, Lenin!*. The claim is that it provides the necessary corrective to *Lenin's* sentimental *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the East), illustrating how the Stasi terror penetrated every pore of East Germans' private lives. But is this really the case?

Like so many other films depicting the harshness of Communist regimes, *The Lives of Others* misses their true horror. How so? First, what sets the film's plot in motion is the corrupt minister of culture, who wants to get rid of the top German Democratic Republic (GDR) playwright, Georg Dreyman, so he can pursue unimpeded an affair with Dreyman's partner, the actress

Christa-Maria. In this way, the horror that was inscribed into the very structure of the East German system is relegated to a mere personal whim. What's lost is that the system would be no less terrifying without the minister's personal corruption, even if it were run by only dedicated and "honest" bureaucrats.

Equally troublesome is the film's portrayal of Dreyman. He is idealized in the opposite direction—a great writer, both honest and sincerely dedicated to the Communist system, who is personally close to the top regime figures. (We learn that Margot Honnecker, the Party leader's wife, gave him a book by Solzhenitsyn strictly prohibited to ordinary people.) One cannot but recall here a witty formula of life under a hard Communist regime: Of the three features—personal honesty, sincere support of the regime and intelligence—it was possible to combine only two, never all three. If one was hon-

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